MYSTICAL INITIATION

DOM S. LOUISMET O.S.B.

The Dream of S. Cecilia—Azambre.

"I SLEEP, AND MY HEART WATCHETH"—(Cant. v. 2).

MYSTICAL INITIATION

By

DOM SAVINIEN LOUISMET, O.S.B.

Author of "The Mystical Knowledge of God," etc., etc.

WITH AN APPENDIX

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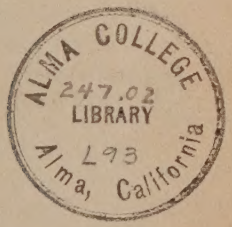

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PREFACE

IN order to convey from the beginning some idea of what the reader may expect to find in this new treatise, I should have given it a lengthy sub-title, something in this wise:

MYSTICAL INITIATION—"BY MEANS OF THE FIVE FIRST CHAPTERS OF THE CANTICLE OF CANTICLES, ABRIDGED, PARAPHRASED, AND COMMENTED ON FOR THE LITTLE ONES OF THE FLOCK OF CHRIST."

This of course was inadvisable; a short, pregnant title being always preferred both by publishers and readers.

It has always struck me that the Sacred Liturgy does not hesitate to put under the eyes of all the faithful, indiscriminately, diverse passages of the CANTICLE OF CANTICLES; and I have had occasion to observe how sincerely and deeply pious souls have their feelings stirred by these. Now and again persons under my spiritual direction have begged to be allowed to read and meditate upon this, the most mysterious book of Holy Scripture, for their own edification.

Following in this regard the traditional discipline of the Church and the rules of prudence, I have thought fit to grant this permission to a restricted number only. But the question soon arose in my mind, whether it were not possible

to bring this, the most mystical and consoling of all the sacred books, within the reach of everyone, by eliminating here and there a certain number of verses.

It is to be noted that, according to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, the Canticle of Canticles is susceptible of a threefold interpretation: the first applying exclusively to the Blessed Virgin Mary in her relation to her Divine Son, who is at the same time the heavenly Spouse of her soul; the second, applying to the Church, who, as the corporate aggregation of all the children of light, is the perfect Bride of the Son of God; the third, finally, applying to the individual Christian soul, who brings into her relations with Our Lord a most fervent love. Now the verses of the Canticle of Canticles which it is not advisable, on account of the infirmities of our present condition, to propose to every one as a subject for study and meditation, are precisely those which have a direct reference either to the Blessed Virgin or to Holy Church; so that it were, in my opinion, quite possible, if we leave aside those particular verses, to establish a running text of this most precious book, in some measure abridged, to which no one could take objection, and which would still retain a rich fund of devout exegesis for the edification and comfort of all the faithful. This is precisely the end I have had in view in the following pages. Still, diffident of myself, I submitted this idea to the judgement of theologians as pious as competent, and received from them the warmest approbation and encouragement.

I had not the intention at first of bringing out this work so soon; but it ripened and came to full maturity more quickly than I had anticipated; thanks particularly to the intense labour which the preparation and composition of my preceding volume THE MYSTERY OF JESUS entailed upon me.

This is indeed its proper place in the series of my treatises on Catholic Traditional Mysticism; for it is, as its elder brother, a book on the love of Jesus. Whilst THE MYSTERY OF JESUS states the broad principles concerning the contemplation of Our Lord, the present treatise applies those principles to the individual soul. In fact, it is to be considered as a companion volume to THE MYSTERY OF JESUS.

Mindful of the warning of Our Lord (Matt. vii, 6) *not to give that which is holy to dogs, neither cast our pearls before swine, lest perchance they trample them under their feet and turning upon us they tear us,* I protest I have written this little book in the presence of God, in the fear and in the love of His Divine Majesty, and therefore not for the scurrilous or the foul-minded, whoever or whatever they may happen to be; but only for the clean of heart. Only *the clean of heart will see God* through its pages.

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PART I
THE CHILD-BRIDE

Mystical Initiation

CHAPTER I

The Canticle of Canticles: Its Division and Interpretation

SUMMARY.—An allegory by which is declared the love of God for each individual soul. Three parts corresponding to the three stages of the spiritual life. One comprehensive rule of interpretation.

THE Canticle of Canticles is the sweetest of all the books of Holy Scripture, inasmuch as it makes to each individual soul an application of the whole love of God, such as it shines forth in the other parts of the Holy Bible, and particularly in the Gospels. It moreover has this peculiarity, that it initiates one, in the most persuasive manner, into the art of taking one's delights in Jesus alone.

Under an allegory, which blends together things rural with kingly pomp and splendour, we are presented, in the persons of the bride and bridegroom, with a lively image of the reciprocal love which ought to hold sway during this present life, between the Christian soul and her heavenly Spouse, Our Lord.

Each verse, each separate sentence, nay even

each word of this wonderfully inspired composition, hides some heavenly mystery which it is extremely sweet to investigate and to discover by the interior light of the Holy Spirit.

At first sight, it would seem as though from the very first word to the last there was in the Canticle of Canticles a complete absence of method, of logical sequence, of that systematization which is so dear to the hearts of certain dry-as-dust professors or writers of manuals. It is in very deed, if one may use such an expression, a veritable explosion of love. The incidents seem tumultuously to press upon one another like the waters of a rich spring, and to overflow on all sides without any conventional symmetry, but with a liveliness that is a delight to the eyes, the ears, the mind of the beholder. Origen calls this book: "Jubilus amoris divini: The joyful canticle of divine love." Does love measure its movements by rule and compass, or submit to the slow process of logic?

Yet on close inspection we discover some ground for dividing the Canticle of Canticles into three parts, corresponding to the three stages of the spiritual life, to wit: the Purgative, the Illuminative, and the Unitive Way. It is easy to find in the first two chapters, the picture of the beginnings of a life of love. The Christian soul is then as yet but a child: she is led principally by the sweets of a sensible devotion and has yet to get rid of a good many imperfections. This is the first relay. In the second (chapters iii-v) the soul waxes strong, full of wisdom, and the grace of God is in her. She makes great progress in the knowledge and love of her divine

Spouse, at the same time as she is made to pass through severe trials. In the last three chapters (vi-viii) the soul waxes strong, full of wisdom, and has come to the full maturity of love: the Divine Word, her Bridegroom, wants her all to Himself, and will not let her turn for a single moment to any one else, and He lifts her up to heights of charity which seem to us well nigh incommensurable.

We must understand that every Christian soul, without any distinction of age, or sex, or condition is the bride of the Son of God made man, Our Lord Jesus Christ. She came into the supernatural world through the sacrament of Baptism, she grows to adult age in Jesus Christ by living the life of grace, that is to say, by the fervent use of the sacraments, by meditation on the Holy Scriptures, especially the Gospel, and by practising the virtues proper to her state of life. Finally she becomes the *wedded wife of the Lamb,* as soon as she enters finally into the ways of purely supernatural life. Then does Our Lord deal with her most lovingly and intimately; then does He make her feel the joys of her union with Him: then does He Himself take His delights in her.

Whosoever you are who take this little book in hand, I recommend you to read it slowly, thoughtfully, with great simplicity, and praying the while. Keep your soul open to the illuminations and secret impressions of the Holy Spirit; and when the mood comes upon you of breaking into transports of love for your virgin Spouse, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God and your sweet Saviour, allow it full sway.

I even wish you would, first of all, and before anything else, read the sacred text, such as I have prepared it for you in Chapters III and XXVII of this volume, endeavouring to find out by yourself one, or more than one, of the several mystical, that is to say spiritual, meanings of it. One does not need to be very learned for that. With your knowledge of the Catechism and of the Holy Gospel, and your own personal experiences, however limited they may have been, of the ways of God, it must be possible to you to discover, were it but on the surface of the sacred text, some pious meaning.

One rule of interpretation will suffice, an extremely simple rule, this namely: always to read a spiritual, supernatural and evangelical meaning into the material representations and lively expressions of conjugal human love which the Holy Spirit has judged good to place under our eyes, in order to make us understand some small part of the excess of the love of the Son of God for us, and the wonderful familiarity which He wants us to bring into our intercourse with Him.

As a rule we are not daring enough to believe in the fullness of the love of Jesus for each one of us personally, individually. Nor do we dare freely to allow ourselves to use expressions of tender affection, such as this dear heavenly Spouse has a right to expect and positively longs to receive from us. When He is looking for a loving embrace we content ourselves with presenting Him with a cold, stiff reverence: when He wishes to press us tenderly upon His heart, we offer Him ceremonious adoration at a dis-

tance. Ah! what a different lesson the Canticle of Canticles teaches us!

Before proceeding to our paraphrase of the sacred text it is advisable that we should present some preliminary theological notions. We will do so in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

One word, whispered in the ear of the Bride

SUMMARY.—How much the Word of God has loved us from all eternity. How He began loving us with His human Heart at the very moment of His Incarnation. How He has loved us throughout all His earthly life and Sacred Passion, and since He is seated in glory at the right hand of His Father. What He wants to do with us.

O LITTLE soul of good will, if it is thy wish to learn how to lisp the syllables of divine love, listen first of all to what I have to tell thee.

Jesus, the Son of God and Our Lord, has loved thee first, He has loved thee personally, for thine own individual sake, from all eternity. He has loved thee with an ineffable, incomprehensible love, which moved Him, together with His heavenly Father and His Holy Spirit, to decree thy creation which was to take place in due time, making thee into His own image and likeness, raising thee to the supernatural order of grace as a preparation to that of glory which is to follow: in short, wishing to impart to thee a share of His own divine sanctity and of His own

divine bliss—in part whilst thou art yet here below, to the full of thy capacity when thou wilt be in heaven.

And now, listen! for this is a deep mystery and a most affecting one, though so often passed over in silence by those who deem themselves *masters in Israel* (John iii, 10); listen! At the precise moment of His Incarnation, Our blessed Lord received in His created mind the infused knowledge of everything that it was necessary for Him to know in His capacity of Redeemer of the world. A full and clear perception was given Him of everything connected with His work as Saviour of all men. From that moment forth He knew them all and every one of them in particular; as well those who had lived from the time of Adam until then, as those who were yet to come, century after century, to the very end of all time.

Therefore thou must realize that, from the very first moment of His Incarnation, Our Lord has known thee with His human mind and loved thee with His human heart, although thou wert not yet in existence. He called thee by thy name, chose thee and marked thee for His own, and forthwith began to love thee, thee I say, personally, individually, with a singular and exclusive love, with a love humano-divine, quite distinct from the purely divine love with which He has loved thee from all eternity.

True, even such a marvellous supplement, the humano-divine love of the heart of Jesus for thee, added on to the purely divine love of the Eternal Word, cannot swell its sum total, since divine love is in itself infinite; but it is a fresh

demonstration, and a very moving one, of this infinite love.

Why do we call "humano-divine" this special love of the heart of Jesus for thee? Because it is at the same time human and divine. On the one hand it is truly human, being the love of a human heart, the love that comes from the heart of the *Son of Man,* and from His whole human nature, for thee. And, on the other hand, this same human love is at the same time divine on two accounts: first because although human, the heart of Jesus belongs to a divine person, the second of the Blessed Trinity; then, because from that very fact that it belongs to the Person of the Word, that same human heart has, so to say, behind it, the full infinitude of the pure divine love of the Word; it is the created organ or instrument and the most expressive symbolical representation of the love of the Word of God, nay, of the whole Blessed Trinity, for us men.

Since the first moment of His life on earth, through all the incidents of His sacred passion, and afterwards in glory, Jesus has not ceased a single instant to think of thee, to love thee, to carry thee about in His heart, during all the time that elapsed before thou camest into the world. And when at last thou wert born; when above all, thou wert baptized, Jesus began in earnest to play the game of love with thee.

Understand, O my dear Christian, man of good will, meek and humble—understand that this lover of thy soul is none other than thy very God. He wants to take hold of thee, body and soul, and make thee wholly supernatural. He

longs to see thee lay down as thy wager in this divine venture, in this game of love, the whole man of thee, body, soul, intellect, sensibility, will; the whole tree, root and branch and leaf and fruit.

Having raised thee, His rational creature, to the dignity of His spouse, He now wants to communicate Himself to thee in an ineffable manner, and to take hold of thee from within: but, of course, with thy consent; only with thy consent.

I entreat thee, allow Him so to love thee. And as for thee, do thou make return to the love of Jesus with all the energies of thy being both natural and supernatural, even as does the bride of the Canticle of Canticles, as thou shalt presently see.

CHAPTER III

Abridged text of the first two Chapters of the Canticle

SUMMARY.—The Spouse speaking to herself, then to her companions, finally to her Heavenly Bridegroom. Reply of the Beloved and passionate dialogue which ensues.

Note.—The sacred text is set in italics: I wish I could have written it in letters of gold, on most precious illumined vellum, with a pen forged by some Seraph and dipped in the flames which burn on the Altar of Paradise.

What is written in common type is no part of the sacred text, but interwoven with it, merely to help the reader to grasp the literal meaning of the Hebrew phrase, which would remain obscure if it were translated word for word.

(Chapter I of the Canticle of Canticles.)

THE BRIDE, speaking to herself, says outright:

"*Let him kiss me, with the kiss of his mouth.*"

Then turning to her Beloved, she adds:

"*Thy name* is as *oil poured out.*

"*Therefore young maidens have loved thee.*

"*Draw me.*

"*We will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments.*"

Now addressing her maiden companions, she says:

"*The King hath brought me into his store-rooms.*"

Then she turns again to her divine Bridegroom and exclaims:

"*We will be glad and rejoice in thee.*"
"*The righteous love thee.*"

Again, to her attendants:

"*O ye daughters of Jerusalem,*" listen: I have a secret to impart to you.

"*I am black, but beautiful.*"
(Black) "*as the tents of Cedar,*"
(Beautiful) "*as the curtains of Solomon.*"
Pray: "*Do not consider that I am brown,*
Because the sun hath altered my complexion.
The sons of my mother have fought against me.
They have made me the keeper in the vineyards;
My own *vineyard I have not kept.*"

To her Bridegroom:

"*O thou whom my soul loveth*
Show me where thou feedest,
Where thou liest in the mid-day,
Lest I begin to wander after the flocks of thy companions."

The Bridegroom replies:

"*If thou knowest not* where I feed and lie in the mid-day,

O fairest among women,
Go forth,
And follow after the steps of the flocks,
And feed thy kids beside the tents of the shepherds."
"*O my love,*
To my company of horsemen, in Pharao's chariots, have I compared thee.
Thy cheeks are beautiful as the turtledove's,
Thy neck as jewels.
We will make thee chains of gold, inlaid with silver."

THE BRIDE, calling to mind one of her dearest remembrances:

"*While the King was at his repose*
My spikenard sent forth its perfume.
A bundle of myrrh is *my beloved to me. . . .*
A cluster of cyprus is *my love to me*
In the vineyards of Engaddi."

JESUS, to the soul freshly baptized or made white in the sacrament of penance:

"*Behold: thou art fair, O my love.*
Behold, thou art fair.
Thy eyes are as those of doves."

THE SOUL in the transport of her admiration:

"*Behold, thou art fair, my beloved,*
And comely.
Our bed is flowery.
The beams of our houses are of cedar,
Our rafters of cypress trees."

(Chapter II of the Canticle of Canticles.)

JESUS, the heavenly Bridegroom, speaking to

Himself, or else addressing His angels and saints in paradise, exclaims:

"*I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys.*
As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters."

THE ENAMOURED SOUL:

"*As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood,*
So is my beloved among the sons of men.
I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired,
And his fruit was sweet to my palate.
He brought me into the cellar of wine,
He set in order charity in me.
Stay me up with flowers,
Compass me about with apples,
Because I languish with love.
His left hand is under my head,
And his right hand shall embrace me."

JESUS addressing Himself to all His servants both in heaven and on earth:

"*O ye daughters of Jerusalem,*
I adjure you,
By the roes and the harts of the fields,
That you stir not up
Nor make the beloved to awake,
Till she please."

THE SOUL, in the midst of the ecstatic sleep of divine contemplation, exclaims:

"*The voice of my beloved!*
Behold he cometh, leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping over the hills."

" My beloved is a roe, or a young hart.
Behold he standeth behind our wall,
Looking through the windows,
Looking through the lattices.
Behold my beloved speaketh to me."

JESUS to the fervent soul:

" Arise, make haste and come,
My love, my dove, my beautiful one.
For winter is now past,
The rain is over and gone.
The flowers have appeared in our land,
The time of pruning is come,
The voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
The fig-tree hath put forth her green figs,
The vines in flower yield their sweet smell.
My love, my beautiful one, arise and come!
My dove in the clifts of the rock,
In the hollow place of the wall,
Show me thy face,
Let thy voice sound in my ears,
For thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely."

Now THE BRIDE makes this recommendation to her companions: unless it be Our Lord Himself speaking to the spiritual directors of the Bride:

" Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vine:
For our vineyard hath flourished."

Then musingly to herself, THE BRIDE says very sweetly:

" My beloved, who feedeth among the lilies,
Is to me, and I to him,
Till the day breaks and the shadows retire."

Nevertheless He hides himself at times. Then she cries out:

" Return, my beloved,
Be like to a roe, or to a young hart
Upon the mountains of Bether."

CHAPTER IV

LET HIM KISS ME WITH THE KISS OF HIS MOUTH. (i, 1.)

SUMMARY.—These words reveal to us how God wishes to be loved of us and in what manner our own heart craves to love God. They indicate also the starting point of the Bride in the career of the spiritual life and whereto she aspires. Certain things she does not ask for.

THE musician of genius stands revealed at one touch of his bow on the violin; so with the Canticle of Canticles: its very first words betray the flaming spirit of love divine which inspires it.

These first words cast a vivid light upon the deep enigma we are to ourselves. They reveal that we are made for love, for love divine. To love and be loved is the craving of our heart, a craving that no created object can appease. Now God is love, all love, love in three persons, a shoreless and bottomless ocean of love. *Deus caritas est.* (1 John iv, 16.) As for Jesus, He is *love made man.* In his turn, the fervent Christian, by the virtue of the sacraments, to which he gives their full effect in himself, is *man made love.* Shall we then wonder that the Holy Spirit should put on his lips this strange request:

"Ah! let God kiss me with the kiss of his mouth!"

Moved thereto by grace, the soul, whether she be still quite innocent or a convert from a life of sin, begins thus to beg and plead for the divine endearments. She is not ashamed to request the Son of God, from the throne of His infinite majesty, lovingly to look down upon her and stoop down to her very level, whilst she is still on earth and laden with imperfections, and embrace and kiss her, and let her be familiar with Him, in the same way as human lovers are with one another.

The amazing thing is that the Son of God, in the splendour of His glory at the right hand of His Father, surrounded with millions of angels and saints, does not disdain to listen to and tenderly receive, the sighs of love of this little soul in exile, and to grant her bold request. See what takes place at the Communion rail. Is not Holy Communion a kiss of the mouth of the Son of God, a kiss on the lips of that lowly one?

The first kiss of God was impressed on that soul at her Baptism, and divine love made it so burning that it left a mark which can never be erased. Now the fervent soul wishes ever to receive fresh impressions of the divine sweetness, and therefore she keeps repeating: "Oh! let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." Longing for actual graces, longing for Holy Communion, longing for divine contemplation, longing for the vision face to face and the joys of paradise: all these are expressed in that short ejaculation.

God has nothing so much at heart as to im-

part to us all his goods: only we must wish for them and beg for them.

By these words: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," the bride shows what is her starting-point in the race for sanctity and where she aspires to reach. She is already firmly established in the state of grace and in fervour; and she aims at the more perfect union which is obtained by the practice of mental prayer, in that act of divine contemplation which is properly "Mystical Theology." That is what she longs to obtain. Shall we mention also the things that she does not wish for herself? These are the extraordinary and miraculous favours, such as ecstasies, raptures, visions, revelations.

Just as we ought ardently to wish and prepare ourselves for the mystical union which is brought about by mental prayer and the use of the sacraments, so must we also guard against desiring the miraculous gifts.

Following on the footsteps of Origen, St. Gregory the Great, St. Bernard, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis de Sales, and our contemporary writer, Father Arintero, O.P., I interpret the Canticle of Canticles as treating of the ordinary mystical union, towards which every one may tend, and to which all our efforts ought to be directed.

A petition like this: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," abruptly proffered, seemingly without rhyme or reason, shows forth what a fire of love is already burning within that little soul. In this wise does a volcano emit violent and unexpected jets of flames.

Thus, at the outset, the Canticle of Canticles

declares how God wishes to be loved of us, and the way in which our own heart craves to love God and be loved by Him. Let us follow the lead of the Child-Bride; let us make for the Lover of our soul; let us go repeating: "Yes, let him kiss me; oh! let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."

CHAPTER V

The Name and Surnames of the Bridegroom

SUMMARY.—Thy name is as oil poured out. How the name of Jesus has spread itself in the world and done good to it. The surname of Christ and other appellations.

WHAT is the name of this dear Bridegroom of our souls? It is Jesus.

Jesus! Jesus! two short syllables, but the sound of which have shaken the world to its very foundations. *In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum: Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth.* (Ps. xviii, 5.)

This name of Jesus, brought from heaven by the Archangel Gabriel, is the culminating point of the history of the world: we date events according as they took place before or after the solemn moment when it was for the first time pronounced on this earth.

Note how the name of Jesus spread all over the world, percolated through every century, entered as an *oil of gladness* into every heart of good will.

When she proclaimed that the name of Jesus was as oil poured out, did the little bride perceive that she was giving him also His surname? Christ means the man upon whom the conse-

crating oil has been poured out; the anointed of the Lord.

Our Jesus is indeed the Lord's anointed. Anointed as King since he is *King of kings* (Apoc. xix, 16)—*immortal King of ages* (1 Tim. i, 17.) *The Lord to whom my Lord said: Sit thou at my right hand* (Ps. cix, 1)—*and of whose Kingdom there shall be no end.* (Luke i, 23.)

Anointed as prophet, He that is not only *propheta magnus* (Luc. xii, 6), the greatest of all prophets, but the centre around which all prophecies are converging; the supreme object of them all.

Anointed with priestly unction, since *The Lord hath sworn it and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchisedech.* (Ps. cix, 4.)—*And Christ did not glorify himself that he might be made a high priest, but he that said unto him: Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.* (Heb. v, 5.) —And *Christ being come an high priest of the good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation; neither by the blood of goats or of calves, but by his own blood, entered once into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption.* (Heb. ix, 11, 12).—*For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.* (Heb. vii, 26.)

This, then, is his name: JESUS, and this his surname: CHRIST. Jesus Christ: oh! what oil poured out upon the gaping wounds of the human race! and how quickly and thoroughly

it would heal them, if only the unfortunate men would allow this good Samaritan Jesus to attend to them! Peter, at the gate of the Temple which was called Beautiful, said to the man lame from his mother's womb: *Silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk: and he leaping up stood, and walked and went in with them into the temple, praising God.* (Acts iii, 6-8.)

Another way in which the name of Jesus spreads like oil and penetrates through all the regions of the mind and the avenues of the heart, is by means of the beautiful multiplicity of its other surnames. Here are a few:

The Lord. (*passim* in the whole New Testament.)

The Holy One. (Luke i, 35.)

The Holy of Holies. (Ps. cix, 3.)

The desired of all nations. (Agg. ii, 8.)

The Promised One. (John iv, 25.)

The Word. (John i, 1-15.)

The Word made flesh. (*ibid.*)

The Only Son in his Father's bosom. (John i, 18.)

Alpha and Omega. (Apoc. i, 8.)

Emmanuel, that is to say: God with us. (Is. vii, 14.)

He that is Wonderful. (Is. ix, 6.)

Angel of the great counsel. (Is. ix, 6.)

Father of the world to come. (Is. ix, 6.)

Son of David, of Abraham, of Man, Son of the Virgin. (Is. vii, iv; Matt. i, 23; Luke i, 27.)

The New Adam. (1 Cor. xv, 45.)

The Good Shepherd. (Eccl. xviii, 13. Is.

xl, 11; Jer. xxi, 10. Ezech. xxiv, 12-23, xxvii, 24. John x, 11-16.)

Good Master. (Mark x, 17.)

Prince of Pastors. (Pet. v, 4.)

Prince of Peace. (Is. ix, 6.)

Greater than Solomon. (Matt. xii, 42.)

The Light of the world. (John i, 9, viii, 12.)

The Living Bread which came down from heaven. (John vi, 41-51.)

Lamb of God. (John i, 29. Apoc. v, 12.)

Saviour. (2 Kings xxii, 2. Job xiii, 16. Ps. xxiv, 5. Is. xii, 2. Jer. xiv, 8. Osee xiii, 4. Zech. ix, 9. Luke ii, 11. John iv, 42. 1 Tim. iv, 10. Acts v, 31.)

Mediator between God and man. (1 Tim. ii, 5.)

The first begotten of the dead. (Apoc. i, 5.)

The Resurrection and the life. (John xi, 25.)

Our Pasch. (1 Cor. v, 7.)

Our advocate with the Father. (1 John ii, 1.)

Judge of the living and the dead. (Act. x, 42.)

The Bridegroom. (Ps. xviii, 6. Cant. *passim.* Osee ii, 19-20. Matt. ix, 15, xxv, 6. Apoc. xxi, 9.)

O Christian soul, do not read the above as a dry and meaningless nomenclature. Do not pass lightly by these various appellations of the one object of thy love, the Lord Jesus. Learn to see and taste, by prayerful meditation, how sweet is each one of these surnames. It will even do thee good to look up the references in the Bible: it may serve to introduce thee to a working knowledge and appreciation of this Book of books.

JESUS: most enchanting and tremendous of all names, on hearing which let *every knee bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth or under the earth, and every tongue confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father.* (Philip. ii, 10-11.)

Oh! how the fervent Christian delights in repeating incessantly that blessed name of the Lover of his soul! and how he grieves to hear it bandied about in blasphemy by men and women and even little children, as is so often the case nowadays! Then he applies himself fervently to make amends and offer condign reparations to his Lord and love.

CHAPTER VI

Young Maidens love Thee (i, 2.)

SUMMARY.—Who are the young maidens. What is theirs already and what they lack. Some specimens. What our Lord proposes to them at the outset.

YOUNG MAIDENS.

Who are they? In the Canticle of Canticles, in the mind of Our Lord and of His Church, they are those little souls who are beginners in the spiritual life, just starting in the race-course of the love of God. Such are, first of all, the little Christian children and the youths of both sexes who have been properly brought up, instructed in the catechism and preserved from contamination; then those persons who have just received a special vocation, as for instance the Apostles of Our Lord, when He called upon them to follow Him; or again whosoever is called to a more perfect life and has only just begun it, as is the case with novices of various religious orders, or young men aspiring to the holy priesthood; finally all fresh converts either from heresy, or infidelity, or from a sinful life or from a tepid one: in one word, all those who, once and for all, have really broken with the previous sinful past, but are not as yet far advanced on the way of spiritual perfection.

Such are the little souls, *adolescentulæ*, of whom the Bride speaks in this verse, and one of whom she humbly reckons herself to be.

These little souls already love Our Lord with tender affection. Jesus knows it; but He is pleased to hear His child-bride telling Him so. At times, He will inspire her, by the grace of His Holy Spirit, with prayers like the following: "O dear Lord, allow me to offer to Thee, together with my own heart, also the love and adoration of my sisters, of my brethren, of all who are in this Church, around thy altar: all this do I offer to Thee. Young maidens love Thee! Little souls love Thee!"

The Apostles, whilst their divine Master was with them: see how full of real good-will they were, and full also, at the same time, of great imperfections. Though admitted to such a familiar intercourse with Our Lord and favoured with such intermittent flashes of spiritual illumination, yet they were but beginners. They were of the number of little souls.

The poor Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, good-natured Nicodemus, Zacheus the publican, the woman caught in adultery and brought for Our Lord to condemn, but whom he sent away absolved, Magdalen after He had exorcised from her seven devils, all these were only little souls; little for the time being, but who were to grow and wax strong. The race-course to the goal of Christian perfection stretched out its endless path before them, and by the grace of God, they did not hesitate to enter upon it with all their heart.

The Royal Magi, no doubt, dated their first

steps in the career of Christian sanctity from the happy moment when they were privileged to offer to the little infant Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh, together with their own loving hearts. Oh! how they then began to love Him!

Even the good thief on the cross, sprinkled with the dew of the blood of Jesus at his side, suddenly was turned into a little soul, very pure, very meek and humble, very loving. And Jesus made him, then and there, run the whole race of sanctity in the short space of three hours; when it takes others thirty, sixty, ninety years, and perhaps some purgatory in the end, to do it.

All the prodigals who with sincere repentance turn back to their heavenly Father and begin a new life, are of the number of little souls, for whom we are writing this commentary on the Canticle.

St. Paul struck down as by lightning on the road to Damascus, found himself turned, at the voice of Our Lord, into a little soul quite meek and humble, and began forthwith to love Him who had revealed Himself in such dazzling brightness.

Our Lord teaches the mystical doctrine in all its sublimity even to little souls, and whilst they are yet only quite at the beginning. His discourse during the night to Nicodemus (John iii, 1-22), to the Samaritan woman at the well (John iv, 1-31), to His Apostles, to the crowds; the very first sentences of His sermon on the Mountain (Matt. v, 3-13): are they not so many examples in point? He sets it before us in his first public utterances, the Beatitudes, which are

the very highest goal and crowning attainment in the practice of the mystical life.

Should not this consideration suffice to show the reasonableness of the thesis we are setting forth in our treatises on Catholic traditional Mysticism, to wit that all men, without exception, are called to the fullness of the life of love, and that the words "Mystical life" mean nothing else but such a life?

CHAPTER VII

Draw Me. (i, 3.)

SUMMARY.—What God says by the prophet Osee of the cords of Adam. Humble avowal the child-bride makes of her weakness. What part the will plays in the business of love.

THE soul says to God and Our Lord: *Draw me,* because unless His prevenient grace first of all draws us out of our apathetic mood, and sets us walking, then running and, in the end, flying, in the ways of his commandments, we are not able to follow Christ. But, through the grace of the sacraments, when we give it its full play, not only are we able to follow our Lord, but we do so with the eagerness of true love.

"Draw me, drag me along, do me violence if need be, but I must go out of myself, out of the narrow mansion of my self-love, out of all the toils of created things. Cost what may, I want to be set free and to follow after Thee, my dear Lord."

Six hundred years before the Christian era God said by the mouth of the prophet Osee (xi, 1-4) "*Israel was a child and I loved him . . . and I was like a foster-father to Ephraim. I carried them in my arms.* Now it happened that by their own fault *they knew not that I healed*

them. But I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love; I will make myself man, their very own brother by flesh and blood; I will be a sacrificial lamb, giving myself up, for their love, to the most cruel death; I will give them my flesh to eat and my blood to drink during the days of their pilgrimage on earth; I will be the lover and husband of their souls during time and for all eternity. Be these the cords with which I shall draw them. We shall see whether they will withstand."

Now in saying: *Draw me*—the converted soul takes the part of God, falls in with His designs, surrenders to His love and mercy, and entreats Him to make her all His own.

Two things are implied in that short prayer: first an avowal by the soul of her own inability to do anything supernatural, unless the grace of God moves her to it; then a firm resolve of the will to co-operate with grace. It is as though she said: "It is true, my Lord, that without Thy help I can do nothing in the way of love: neither begin, nor keep up, nor persevere to the end. Alas! I have but too much experienced my own weakness. But, O my heavenly Spouse, dear Lord Jesus, do Thou take me in hand, 'draw Thou me' I beg of Thee, for I am ready to co-operate. 'Tis my will."

Hereupon let us examine the part played by the will in the business of love.

It were an error to persuade oneself that in love one has only to let oneself be, as though the inclination once being there, one had only delightfully to follow, and things would of themselves go smoothly, without any hindrance.

Not so indeed, no. Whether it be question of human love or divine love; of that which is purely natural or that which is supernatural, some vigorous exercise of the will is required.

To love, deeply to love, as those do who plight their faith to one another before marriage; as it is their duty to continue to love after they are married, is not an affair in which only the senses and the emotional part of man are concerned. The will has something to say in the matter. One must will to love. One must will to keep it up. Or else it is not serious; not solid and firm. To will to love, to look upon it as a duty, not an amusement, brings into the mutual relation of the lovers dignity and nobleness. One must not enter upon the adventure of love, unless it be in view of the honourable and far-reaching ends of marriage such as God has instituted it, binding the two together into one for their whole life.

When once therefore the lovers have lawfully entered upon this way of life, they must take the means to make it lasting; the will must assert itself; one must love because in duty bound; one must continue to love, whatever may afterwards betide; one must carry on the will to love. Assuredly that is no child's play, nor an amusement of a few passing hours, nor a few days' or weeks' adventure, where the emotions of the senses, the cravings of an undisciplined heart and the tricks of a wild imagination run riot for a while and then die out suddenly. The foundations of an enduring love must be firm and unshakable.

Now what we say of human love is equally

true, nay much more so, when it is a question of our love of God. A courageous and persevering exercise of the will is required thereto. An act of the will is called for at the outset; acts of the will are necessary all along the path; one must constantly stir one's will to love God; or else after a while, one will simply cease to love.

There comes a moment in the spiritual life, when the novelty of it wears away; when the sensible impressions of grace recur only at ever widening intervals. God, nevertheless, has lost nothing of His rights over our affections: He remains the same, as worthy of love as He ever was; and the bond between Him and our soul is not broken. Now is the time for our will to assert itself. The bride redoubles her supplications to the heavenly Spouse, to the effect that He should draw her after Him, out of her natural sluggishness.

Draw me. Draw me always. Do not permit, O my God, that I should ever henceforth falter in that beautiful path of love. Oh! do not permit that I should again betray Thee! Do thou strengthen my will. I want to love Thee, I will it, I want to will it, do Thou see to it that I keep on willing and that I do so more and more vehemently, energetically. *Domine custodi hanc voluntatem.* (1 Paral. xxix, 19.) Lord, preserve in me this will, inviolate to the end. Do not cease one single moment to draw me after Thee.

So it is clear that our queen-faculty, the will, is paramount in the act of love as well as in the act of spiritual faith. Neither faith nor love

can be imposed from outside on a man, without that man giving in and co-operating. One must will to believe, one must will to love. Whosoever ceases thus to will, turns traitor both to God and to self: he murders faith, he kills love; he is guilty of his own spiritual death: and that is the greatest of all misfortunes.

Whosoever is desirous of preserving in himself the life of faith, the life of love, let him take up arms against his own natural fickleness.

In the same way, whosoever wishes to remain faithful to divine love must sedulously keep ward and watch around his own fickle heart. The soul who has engaged herself with the heavenly Spouse could not be allowed to take herself back again after a while, on the pretext that she had not realized to what extent she would miss the passionate love of things created. "This intercourse with creatures is so entrancing! My heart goes out to them. I cannot, cannot help it. I am simply overcome. What shall I do? Surely under these circumstances I am not expected to be held down by obligations which have become irksome, unbearable? Who will blame me for breaking an engagement which would prevent my tasting and enjoying such sweets?"

Unfortunate one! What have you done? Why have you slackened the austere bonds of love? Why have you put away helmet and breastplate and sword and ceased to mount guard around the citadel of your heart? Only disaster could be expected from such a course.

Therefore, O you who wish to safeguard your treasure, *watch and pray*. Force yourself to

will; you must make your own this business of loving God; you must enter into it with a will, and remain all along actively engaged in its performance: then you will not in vain sigh out to the heavenly Bridegroom: *Draw me, Draw me!*

CHAPTER VIII

We will run. (Cant. i, 3.)

SUMMARY.—That we are never isolated, either in the good or in the evil we do. We ought to hurry, for time is short. The two feet or wings of a fervent soul.

AFTER saying: *Draw me*, the child-bride adds these words: *We will run.* She does not say: "I shall" but "We will"; thereby proclaiming an important spiritual fact, namely that one is never quite alone or isolated, in the paths of virtue, or (if so be) in those of vice. There is always someone or several to bear us company. We always draw someone along with us by the compelling virtue of example.

Still more true is this when it is a question of Superiors of religious communities, ecclesiastical superiors, fathers and mothers in regard to their household, priests, and in general all those in authority of whatever kind. If these allow themselves to be drawn by the sweet bonds of divine love, all those clustered about them will spontaneously follow suit, and tread the paths of virtue. If on the contrary they become slack and tepid, all those who hang on to them will experience a proportionate diminution of fervour.

Whosoever passionately loves Our Lord, will be drawn by Him, and never lose a moment, for Jesus never lags on the way to perfection. From the very beginning He points out to us the distant goal, sublime, impossible of attainment. He says: *Be ye perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matt. v, 48); thus opening out before us an interminable race-course. He does not want us to set any limit to our ambition for personal holiness. He gives us a start, then urges us on and draws us after Him, giving encouragement by word of mouth and gesture. How could one help running, under those conditions? Ceaseless progress on the way of perfection without ever coming to a stop and saying: "There, that is enough," such is the law of the spiritual life during our pilgrimage on earth, as we have already pointed out in a preceding volume. (Cf. THE MYSTICAL LIFE, Ch. III.)

We are obliged to press on, because we have no time to lose, life being so short. As soon as death intervenes, one cannot gain any more merit or grow in the love of God. One's final degree of perfection is attained and will remain unchangeable for evermore. Our Lord states this unequivocally, and shows that this law held good even for Himself. He said (John ix, 4): *I must work the works of him that sent me whilst it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.* Obviously the day of which He there spoke was the time of His life on earth, and the night was the hour of His death. But how shall we run? By means of divine contemplation and saintly action alternately or

sometimes simultaneously practised, as I have described them already in my treatise on THE MYSTICAL LIFE and in that on DIVINE CONTEMPLATION FOR ALL. Contemplation, Saintly action, these are the feet or the wings with which a Christian soul may walk or run or even fly in the footsteps of her Beloved.

CHAPTER IX

The Odour of the Ointments of the Beloved

SUMMARY.—The ointments here spoken of are the infinite perfections of the Divine Word and the mysteries of His Sacred Humanity. That a mystic is known by his taste for divine things, whilst a non-mystic by his taste for earthly things.

THE ointments of Jesus, what are they? They are on the one hand the infinite perfections of His divine nature, and on the other, the sweet mysteries of His Sacred Humanity. These two sorts of ointments, mixed together in the person of Our Lord, spread their perfume all through the heavenly Jerusalem and the suffering Church of Purgatory and the whole militant Church; but, here below, only fervent souls perceive their sweet odour; and this is precisely the test by which they may be known as genuine mystics.

It is possible once to have been a mystic and after a while to have ceased so to be. One may think oneself a mystic and be, figuratively speaking, thousands of miles away from it. And also one may be a mystic and of the finest quality, unknown to oneself. It is important to give such a definition or description of a mystic that

no mistake can be made about it; so that, you for instance, my dear reader, may find for yourself whether you are one or not.

Well, here it is: the mystic is simply a Christian who has a relish for God and divine things; whilst the non-mystic is any man, whether Christian or not, who relishes only earthly things. This twofold test is pointed out in the celebrated exhortation of St. Paul to the Colossians (iii, 1-3) *If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God: mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth, for you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

Yes, in the mystic, the relish for God and heavenly things is paramount, gets the mastery, rules supreme in spite of all its deadly enemies, the old Adam in him, the world and the devils.

With the non-mystic, in spite of his Baptism and the other sacraments he may have received, the government of his life is left in the hands of self-love with its thousand subtle trickeries and its disordered appetite for things created; to this extent that, even if he be in the state of grace, he makes but scanty use of the marvellous resources this state of grace brings him. His mind and heart are filled with delight in things created. The love of this world speaks so loud in him that God can hardly be heard. Self-seeking creeps into all his acts, spoiling even the holiest, causing them to lose much of their spiritual fragrance and of their meritoriousness.

In Catholic, traditional mysticism, which is the only orthodox one, the beginning of the process

is relish for God: *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet,* exclaims the Psalmist (xxxiii, 9). God forestalls us with the blessings of sweetness; He it is who acts upon our soul and at times even upon our senses. *By the Lord this has been done.* (Matt. xxi, 42.) *My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.* (Ps. lxxxiii, 2.)

The mystic takes his delight in God. He never tires of His company. He dearly loves to hold intercourse with Him, either speaking to Him or hearkening. Much as he likes this sort of conversation, there is yet something more entrancing to him: it is when he can, in the presence of God or before the Blessed Sacrament, hold himself speechless, motionless, doing nothing but love, love, simply love—let his heart go out in silent, burning love.

The mystic becomes a child again, a wee child, playing in the presence of God, playing with God, playing the great game of love. There is a marvellous playfulness in the manifestations of the human love of two affianced or of two married persons, also of parents with their little ones and of these with their fond parents. In the same way there is a marvellous, holy playfulness in the effusions of piety of the mystic, in the way he basks in the sunshine of God, and reciprocally in the communications of His very self which the loving God imparts to his darling child. We see this in the Canticle of Canticles. What a divine playfulness and liveliness in those dialogues, throughout all this little love-drama! It is a veritable enchantment. No wonder we hear the child-bride cry out: *We will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments.*

No wonder she is eager to give herself up either to mental prayer or to the practice of any good work, as the Spirit of God may move her.

CHAPTER X

Kingly Dignity of Our Lord.

SUMMARY.—That Jesus is King, proved by the Scriptures. To get at the right idea of the transcending quality of the Kingship of Jesus we must consider in Him the divine nature.

OUR Beloved is King, a most magnificent King; and the fervent Christian soul is raised by Him to share His honours as well as His love.

Zacharias the prophet exclaims: *O daughter of Sion,* that is to say: O city of Jerusalem, O Church of Christ, O little soul full of love: *Rejoice greatly, shout for joy. Behold thy King will come to thee, the Just and Saviour: he is poor and riding upon an ass.* (Zach. ix, 9.) In the Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel told the Blessed Virgin Mary: *Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father, and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end.* (Luke i, 31-33.)

The simple-hearted Wise Men from the

east came to Jerusalem asking: *Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and we are come to adore him.* (Matt. ii, 2-3.) A few days after the raising of Lazarus to life again *a great multitude . . . when they had heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm-trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried: Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel.* (John xii, 12-13.)

Even in the midst of the ignominies of His sacred Passion, the kingly dignity of Our Lord is proclaimed. Pilate asks Him: *Art thou a King then?* Jesus answered: *Thou sayest that I am a King;* and in consequence the Roman governor writes out the title of the cross thus: *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,* and maintains this reading in spite of the furious expostulations of priests and Pharisees. (Matt. xxvii; John xix, 22.)

Now to pass from this earth to the heavenly region. Psalm xxiii helps us somewhat to picture to ourselves the enthusiastic welcome that was given to this *King of Glory* who is also *the King of virtues,* at His coming into his heavenly Kingdom on Ascension day.

Finally, Psalm ii shows to us Our Lord throned in the highest heaven at the right hand of God the Father, whilst our faith discerns Him seated at the same time, with unspeakable meekness, on the throne of His love in the sacrament of Holy Eucharist.

O Christian soul, art thou pleased at last? are thou well satisfied? art thou happy? Behold, He that is taking thee for His own well beloved

little bride. He is God, He is the Divine Word. Is such a bridegroom comely enough? and noble and pleasing enough in thy sight?

It is the Godhead we must take into consideration in the person of Our Lord even more than his human nature. Both natures, the divine and the human, are indissolubly united in Him. Even human nature in Jesus is divine inasmuch as it has no other personality than that of the divine Word, and inasmuch as His flesh has been conceived by the operation of the Holy Ghost, who caused it to germinate or spring forth from the most pure blood of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. It cannot be but that a work of which the Holy Spirit is the immediate author be divine. It is a perfect individual human nature, the most perfect human nature that can ever be thought of, since it has in the most absolute perfection all that is required to the making of a man; and at the same time it is truly divine on account of its immediate author, who is a divine person, the Holy Ghost, and of its mode of production, which transcends all the potentialities of created nature, and finally on account, as we have already said, of its mode of existence in the hypostatic union with the Divine Word.

So, therefore, the flesh of Our Lord is human flesh, born of human flesh; and it is at the same time divine, because produced by the Holy Spirit and united in person with the Son of God. The most holy soul of Jesus is a human soul, perfectly and fully human, because it is the soul which informs and animates that human body

of Our Saviour; and it is at the same time divine in quality and dignity, for the same reasons that its body of flesh is divine. Flesh and soul in Jesus are one and the same person with the Divine Word, and the Divine Word is one and the same God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. That is why Jesus could say reproachfully to one of His Apostles: What, *so long a time have I been with you, and have you not known me? Philip, he that seeth me seeth the Father also. How sayest thou, show us the Father?* (John xiv, 9.)

It was as though He had said: "Stop seeing in Me only a man, or considering my human nature as the main thing in Me: take notice above all of this paramount fact that I am God. I reach out infinitely beyond My human nature; through the transparent veil of My humanity you must discern the splendour of My divine nature. You ought to see in Me, as Peter eloquently proclaimed, *The Son of the Living God.* (Matt. xvi, 16.) Whenever you have dealings with Me, it is with God, not with man, you are having dealings, although My sacred Humanity most assuredly enters into this loving intercourse and is the very sign and sacrament of My love for you."

Our Lord had this same truth in mind when He gently rebuked the youth who called Him *Good Master,* but who, in so doing, did not look beyond the manhood of Christ. *Jesus said to him: Why callest thou me good? None is good but one,* that is *God.* (Mark x, 18.) By these words Our Lord does not deny that He is good, but affirms that He is God, and that this is the

primal fact about Him which is to be taken into consideration.

Precisely because the sacred flesh of Our Lord is so truly divine in its quality and dignity, it is able to enjoy the unique privilege of being present at the same time both in heaven and on earth; on our altars, in our tabernacles, in all the consecrated hosts or fragments of consecrated hosts.

Such then (now to return to our starting-point) such is the absolutely transcending kingly dignity of Our Lord. As God, obviously, He is King; and moreover He is also King in His character of the Man-God; King of angels and men and of all things; King from all eternity and unto all eternity, King of kings, overflowing with magnificence and justice and meekness; a King *whose government* or mark of authority *is upon his shoulder* (Is. ix, 6), and *of whose Kingdom there shall be no end.* (Luke i, 33.)

O little soul, behold Him that cometh to thee with such loving tenderness: thy Bridegroom! The wife of an earthly king is aware that her husband's kingly power will soon cease and that this will be the end of the supreme honours she is receiving on all hands. It is not so with thee, O little soul, enamoured of the King of heaven and wholly given up to His good pleasure: thou art assured that of His Kingdom there will be no end and that thou, His lowly bride, wilt be the well-beloved of His heart throughout all eternity.

CHAPTER XI

The Store-Rooms of King Jesus

SUMMARY.—That these store-rooms are the sacraments which impress a character on the soul. How splendid is the fulness of Christian life even at its beginning. Why is it that people overlook this fact? The Jansenistic thesis. Intense joy of converts. Holy priesthood and religious life.

BY these words: *The King hath brought me into* his store-rooms, the child-bride celebrates her joy at being a Christian.

What may well be the store-rooms of so opulent a King, except vast secret recesses, crowded with casks replete with the most generous wines and choicest liquors, and perhaps with treasures which He wishes to keep hidden from the vulgar gaze? The store-rooms here mentioned are the mysterious receptacles of the most precious and overflowing graces, such as the sacraments which can be received but once, because they impress on the soul an indelible character, thus giving her a right to a marvellous series of special graces, and giving her access, according to her needs, to the other sacraments and to all the treasures of Holy Church.

In the divine plan, Christian life is designed to begin with a magnificent completeness. In

the ancient discipline which prevailed during the first centuries of the Christian era; following upon a more or less protracted period of catechumenal instructions, three sacraments were conferred upon the neophyte on the same day or within a few days: that of Baptism, which made him a child of God; that of Confirmation, which brought to him a supplement of vital strength, making him spiritually an adult, a perfectly equipped Christian and a soldier of Jesus Christ; finally that of the Holy Eucharist, in which he was made to feed upon the very flesh of Our Lord, upon God himself who is the bread of the angels in heaven. In the present discipline of the Church, converts from heresy or Judaism or infidelity, may receive Baptism (under condition if need be), Penance and Holy Eucharist, all on the same day; and they are exhorted to present themselves to the Bishop for Confirmation at the earliest date possible. As for children who are baptized before the age of reason, in some countries, as for instance in Spain, they are confirmed whilst still in infancy; and whether confirmed or not, they are now admitted, thanks to the decrees of Pope Pius X concerning Holy Communion, to the sacraments of Penance and of Holy Eucharist as soon as they reach years of discernment, that is to say at the age of seven or eight.

It is from such heights and with such a fulness of grace that God wants the new-comer to start in the race-course of Christian life for the conquest of perfect love and personal sanctity.

Unfortunately we have well nigh lost sight of the fact that such is indeed the divine plan in

the economy of the supernatural order. We are accustomed to the sight of sin upon a grand scale as it is in the surrounding world, also to the sight of the tepidity and crass ignorance of the things of God which large numbers of Christians display on all sides; and we are but too much aware, by sad experience, of our own cowardice and treachery: now all these causes work together to dim before our eyes the genuine notion of Christian life. One would fain persuade oneself that it were rash to aspire to love God with one's whole heart, even from the beginning, and all along, and to be tenderly loved by Him. And yet, did He not positively and peremptorily say, speaking to all and to each of us without any distinction: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind?* (Matt. xxii, 37.) *With thy whole strength* (Mark xii, 30; Luke x, 27)? Thus shalt thou love God under penalty of falling beneath Thy Christian vocation. It is to all Christians in the persons of the Corinthians that St. Paul says: *See your vocation, brethren* (1 Cor. i, 26), and addresses this exhortation: *I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called.* (Eph. iv, 1.)

But, it may perhaps be asked, from the fact that ordinarily, at least now, such as are beginning to live the true spiritual life are converts from a life of tepidity and neglect, or still worse from a life of downright grievous sinfulness, have we not to make certain reservations? This was a proposition dear to the hearts of Jansenists. Most energetically has the Church condemned it.

Such then are the store-rooms of our beloved King: the sacraments which can be received but once, and give us free access to all the resources which God has accumulated in the hands of Holy Church for our personal sanctification.

Nothing can picture the entrancing joy of a sincere convert, when at last the grace is given him from God, to open his eyes to the wonders of his Baptism and of his Confirmation; when he is brought into these store-rooms of the great King, to take stock of their rich contents, and without hindrance to slake his thirst at those overflowing reservoirs of sweet things: Holy Scripture, the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, the liturgical cycle all round the holy sacrifice of Mass, the lives of the Saints and the History of the Church. He becomes inebriated with delights.

What cries of joy were raised by a Silvio Pellico, a Louis Veuillot, a Paul Féval and, nearer still to us, a Psichari or a Charles de Foucauld, to name but a few among those that are now no more with us—upon the happy event of their return to the practice of Christian life! Nay, what exuberant joy, though perchance outwardly unexpressed, springs forth from the heart of any Christian who, once for all, turns to the passionate love of the Lord Jesus! With what delight does he not *drink at the Saviour's fountains!* (Is. xii, 3.)

Baptism therefore is a first store-room of our dear King of Love. And contiguous to it is that other store-room, the sacrament of Confirmation, to which Baptism is even as a door of entrance. Therein one is made a perfect Christian, and

is put in possession of the fulness of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. Moreover there is nothing to stay him from laying hands on the treasures of the Beatitudes and of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit.

But if our Christian happen to be raised to the priestly dignity, there is quite another store-room thrown open before him with the key of the sacrament of Holy Orders. What additional, most precious and costly treasures are not the daily celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of Mass, the grand official prayer of the Breviary, the incessant study and meditation of Holy Scripture in order that he may be able to thrive on them and feed the souls of his brethren with them?

Or is he perhaps one of those who have heard, in the secret of their heart, the divine call to religious life, and who in consequence have left all things to follow Christ in a higher state of sanctity? Then, by the very fact of his religious profession, he has been brought into that store-room of the King, where are heaped up enormous quantities of the diamonds and precious pearls of the evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. *Numquid ingressus es thesauros nivis?* asks God of holy Job: *Hast thou entered into the store-houses of the snow?* (Job. xxxviii, 22.) These are indeed the true store-houses of the virgin, immaculate snow, our religious vows, especially that of chastity, faithfully observed. Alone the King holds the keys of these marvellous storehouses and brings into them whomsoever He pleases: THE KING, namely our beloved Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER XII

Our Joy in the Lord Jesus

SUMMARY.—The mystery of our indwelling in Jesus. Our Lord's two bodies, the one physical the other mystical. Communion of Saints and joy that flows therefrom.

WE will be glad and rejoice in thee. (I, 3.) How could it ever be otherwise? In the midst of such a plenty of the good things of God as we have just described, it were a sin to allow sadness or discouragement to overcome us.

Note this short expression: *In thee.*

Evidently the bride has learned well the lesson Our Lord read to us at the Last Supper when He said, with such insistence: *Abide in me . . . Abide in my love . . . that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be filled.* (John xv, 4-11.)

Not only do all good things come to us through the hands of Our Lord, through the merits of His sacred passion and death, but we enjoy them only in our union with Him even *as the branch to the vine.* We abide in Him. Through this indwelling of ours in Him are we enabled to live the supernatural life.

Thus this brief word *In thee* reveals to us an immense, a very far-reaching mystery, that of

the actual indwelling of every Christian in Jesus Christ. St. Paul is never tired of bringing forward this doctrine by his repetition of the familiar expression IN CHRISTO. It is, all in one, the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ and that of the Communion of Saints. Here is a Person, the only one in the whole world who has to Himself two organic bodies. This divine Person, the Word, not only took unto Himself a body of flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, but it is His wish vitally to unite unto Himself the whole human race. Jesus has really two distinct bodies: the one physical or natural, animated by His own human soul in the way that other human bodies are animated by their own souls; the other mystical, made up of the assembly of all men of good will wherever found, either on earth, or in purgatory, or in heaven, together with all the blessed angels. *Now therefore, says St. Paul, you are no more strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow-citizens with the Saints, and the domestics of God; built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone: in whom all the building framed together groweth up into an habitation of God in the Spirit.* (Ephes. ii, 19-22.) We all belong to Jesus Christ, we are all the demesne of Jesus Christ, His property, nay we are all in Him, a part of Him, His very members, living His supernatural and divine life.

We will be glad and rejoice in thee.

How entrancing is the sweetness, how irrepressible are the transports of the spiritual joy

one finds in Jesus! a joy which the world knows not, which carnal men cannot understand and must perforce gainsay. But we know it; we have tasted it; we give testimony about it and we proclaim that it absolutely transcends all sensual delights, all intellectual enjoyments within the limits of the purely natural order, all the raptures which can be procured by the sciences, the liberal arts, human glory, the company of the most cultured and friendly persons, or the most pleasing habitation, or all these goods put together. And we know that if during the days of our earthly pilgrimage our joy in Jesus has its hours of eclipse, the time is near at hand when this same joy will be granted us without measure and without any intermittance.

Such is not the case with the worshippers of the world. Whatever they may do in order to amuse themselves and divert their minds from an unpleasant remembrance of solemn truths, they are sad at heart with an incurable sadness, because nothing can take the place of the love of Jesus. Even though unconsciously, their soul wears mourning for the absence of this love.

O Lord Jesus, my heavenly Spouse, there is no true joy but in Thee. Be Thou blessed for ever!

CHAPTER XIII

The Righteous Love Thee

SUMMARY.—Who those are that do not love Jesus. How few the truly righteous are, even among those who profess a devout life. What a glorious company that is of the lovers of Jesus.

THE righteous.

With that one little word, with one light touch of the hand, what a burning condemnation is inflicted on all who do not love Jesus: THEY LACK RIGHTEOUSNESS!

And also what a revelation of the secret of the lamentable weakness of those who commit sin: it is simply that THEY HAVE NO LOVE FOR JESUS!

Unhappy men: they do not love Jesus! Then indeed nothing that they do ought to be a matter of surprise: they are capable of any heavy fall, any spiritual misadventure, any disaster, any moral and material catastrophe.

Ah! my brethren, my dear fellow-men, whosoever you may be, give me leave earnestly to beseech you: do, love Jesus. Love Jesus and all things will work together for your happiness, even though material ill-success should seem to dog your footsteps. You will at least secure for yourselves that great boon, righteousness; you

will stand erect in that fearless moral attitude which strikes terror into the hearts of the enemies of your soul. O Lord Jesus, the righteous love Thee! and it is precisely because they love Thee that they are righteous.

O Thou the Bridegroom of my soul, dear Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist: how well advised are those who love Thee tenderly, passionately, who give to Thee alone and exclusively the most substantial part of their affections! But who are those? They are the just, the righteous, the souls that know no double dealing, keep no shameful secret, hold nothing back, make no compromise, obey no mean motive, drive no hard bargain in the matter of loving God. Shall I dare to say it? such souls are few and far between, even among the crowd of so-called pious people. O my brother, do you wish to taste the sweetness of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to enjoy the extreme familiarity of this most holy Bridegroom in the sacrament of His love? Be candid and simple-hearted as a little child. Cultivate this splendid and dazzling righteousness which is found only in the little ones and such as strive to become like them.

The righteous love thee.

See how true this is. The blessed angels—how righteous they are! they never committed the smallest sin; and now, how they do love Jesus! With what eagerness they make themselves the servants of His Incarnation and of His bride the Church, and of the souls He redeemed by His death on the Cross! See again the true servants of God on earth, the mystics; I mean

those who endeavour to live the life of grace to the full extent of its resources. And see the holy souls in purgatory; how they have not any longer the least attachment to sin, and how they love the holy will of Jesus, though His hand is so heavy upon them. Indeed they love Jesus more than themselves. Finally, see the glorious inhabitants of paradise, all the orders of the saints in their bright array: oh! how do they love their Lord!

But what shall we say of the love of our great Queen, the Blessed Virgin Mary, for her divine Son? she the most immaculate, the most righteous among the righteous, she the most resplendent in holiness among all other creatures!

Finally, above the love that Mary bears to Jesus, there is the ineffable love and complacency with which the Father and the Holy Spirit look upon Our Lord. Indeed we are in glorious company, when we dedicate ourselves to the passionate love of Jesus.

CHAPTER XIV

I am Black but Beautiful, O ye Daughters of Jerusalem

SUMMARY.—The daughters of Jerusalem here alluded to are the angels and the saints. Comparing herself to them as they are in the splendour of glory, she finds herself black with all the imperfections and miseries of the present life; nevertheless she cannot but see and proclaim the beauty of her own state of grace.

UNDER the figure of the earthly city of Jerusalem, which was the capital of the Kingdom of Juda, the Canticle alludes one after the other to two spiritual cities of Jerusalem, the one heavenly, which is the Triumphant Church of the angels and saints, the other the Militant Church which is still on this earth. In this verse the bride is speaking to the angels and saints: but wherever, in the sequel, we shall hear the Bridegroom addressing Himself to the daughters of Jerusalem, as in chapters ii, iii, and vii, He is speaking to members of the Militant Church.

Though at present they are so sharply distinguished from each other, these two spiritual Jerusalems are really but one in Christ and through the Communion of saints: one only *City of the living God*, spreading out wherever

true servants of God, in heaven, on earth and in purgatory itself, are to be found. (Heb. xii, 22.)

Therefore the daughters of Jerusalem to whom the bride is speaking, are all the blessed inhabitants of paradise, angels and saints. Is it not a great wonder to see how the Canticle of Canticles leads us to a literal fulfilment of the word of St. Paul such as it sounds in the translation: *Our conversation is in heaven.* (Phil. iii, 20); for whenever the fervent soul is not actually conversing with her Well-Beloved, then she is speaking with His servants, angels and saints. If perchance she talks with men and inferior creatures, she does it under compulsion, and even then it is of her own Beloved she wants to talk.

As for the angels, besides those who never leave paradise, because their special functions are all about the throne of God, there are also, in close proximity to us, first of all our own guardian angel and all the guardian angels of the persons among whom we live, and also the adoring angels around the Blessed Sacrament, in the Churches where we worship. All these angels we are able to greet lovingly and to venerate; we may beg their kind assistance, congratulate them upon their holiness and bliss, unite our feeble prayers to their sublime acts of adoration, confide to them our pious desires, our sorrows, our hopes, and rest quite assured of the interest they take in all these things, because of the great love they bear us in God. Moreover there are hosts of angels, occasionally flying together through space, alighting and camping here and there around us, in order to check the insolence of the devils and to perform other

duties which God entrusts them with. *Castra Dei sunt haec*, exclaimed Jacob when he saw legions of angels meeting him at his return from Haran: *These are the camps of God.* (Gen. xxxii, 2.) Now the true contemplative has the eyes of his soul open to these splendid realities invisible to bodily senses; he lives in the company of these pure spirits and holds converse with them; he looks upon them as his very best friends, his helpers; he does not hesitate to pour out all the secrets of his heart into their tenderly sympathetic bosoms. The genuinely spiritual man prefers such an intercourse to any conversation with men. Is not that right? People seeing him solicitous to avoid whatever would disturb his holy recollection, accuse him of being a savage. He does not mind. Does he not live with a grand and noble company—the angels of God?

In comparison with them and all the blessed inhabitants of heaven, the Christian soul, in her present condition of a pilgrim, walking by the dim light of faith, assailed by hosts of enemies, vexed with all sorts of tribulations, sees herself as quite black; and yet it is the will of the Holy Ghost that she should also realize her native dignity, both natural and supernatural; I mean the nobility of her nature, the excellency of her gifts of grace, the really great things that God has done to her and the greater gifts He wants to grant her in the future. She therefore humbly acknowledges her frailty and defects, which are the consequences of sin, and yet does not lose sight of the beauty with which God invests her inwardly by His grace. Thereby she keeps her-

self at a safe distance both from discouragement and presumption.

I confess, she says, that I am indeed very plain and black, black with the soot of all my past sins, deformed with all my present defects which are legion. Alas! when compared with you, O blessed angels and saints, I am an ugly little monster, a concentrated evil: such am I in my own self: yes, an evil thing, purulent, contagious, capable of infecting and poisoning the whole world and its inhabitants, capable of causing their death if they could see me in all the horror and malignity of my sins. And now, to think that my dear Lord has not been discouraged by this! and that He still wants to come to me! Now I can understand the heroic fortitude of some saints who, during their life on earth, did not shrink from kissing the lepers' sores. They seemed to say: My dear Lord Jesus Christ has not shrunk from handling me, full of sores as I was, and washing me in His most precious blood, and kissing me and straining me to His heart, at a time when my soul was a million times more nauseous and revolting than these poor suffering members of His: how, then, should I not consider it an honour and a privilege to be permitted to give Him back love for love in the persons of the poor and the afflicted?

But gently! Enough, more than enough has been said in this strain. What will the fastidious Christians of our own days say to this? How small, O my Jesus, is the number of those who now can bear only to picture to themselves or to hear related what Thy saints of either sex, persons of high rank, princes, kings and queens,

have heroically and joyfully done for Thy love!

I am black but beautiful.

Black *as the tents of Cedar.* Genesis in chapter xxv, verse 13, informs us that Cedar was the second son of Ismael and the father of the tribes of Arabia Petræa. It is as though she said: I am black as the tents of the Arabs of the desert, which are rudely made of skins and coarse cloth, without any adornment, besprinkled with innumerable weather-stains of which no one takes any notice, because these tents have to be pitched every night, folded again in haste in the morning, carried away on the backs of camels, handled without any precaution, and stretched out under all the inclemencies of the seasons.

And yet beautiful *as the curtains of Solomon,* which undoubtedly were made of the most precious materials, adorned with silver and gold, jewels and diamonds and priceless gems and pearls, and embroidered by the most skilful hands. "Yes. I repeat it, O blessed angels! though I am black with many involuntary imperfections and ignorances and sins of frailty, yet am I conscious of being beautiful. It were, on my part, a silly affectation and a real ingratitude to pretend I do not know it, since it is all God's doing in His poor handmaid and to Him alone the glory is due.

I am beautiful first of all in the divine image and likeness which is in me, and which even original sin has not blotted out. Beautiful moreover with the foundations and beginnings of sanctity, which my Jesus has already laid down in me, through the efficacy of His grace. Beauti-

ful with all that the sacraments have already wrought in me: as well those sacraments which can be received but once, namely Baptism, Confirmation (and if so be, Holy Orders), as those which I have received hundreds, nay thousands of times, such as Penance and Holy Eucharist. Beautiful with the merits of curbing my unruly passions, performing many works of mercy corporal and spiritual, doing all my actions with purity of intention and fervent love, with sincerest devotedness to the interests of God, with tender solicitude towards the poor, the sinners, the little ones, those in sorrow and distress of any kind. Beautiful finally, on account of the indignities with which I am treated: lashes of the tongue, calumnies, unfair dealings, downright acts of wickedness. These bring to me a likeness, be it ever so faint and far off, to my dear Saviour, Jesus crucified.

It is evident that the fervent soul, illumined by the light of faith, does not admit the hopeless and heart-breaking doctrine of Luther, Calvin and Jansenius about the total and totally irremediable depravity of our nature as a consequence of original sin.

Black but beautiful.

Has not our dear Lord said of Himself, speaking by the mouth of the prophet, at the time of His sacred passion: *I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people. All they that saw me have laughed me to scorn: they have spoken with the lips and wagged the head.* (Ps. xxi, 7, 8.) But was He not, even at that very time, God, the Holy One, the splen-

dour of the Father, the flower of the most Holy Trinity, endowed with an infinite loveliness? O Christian soul, who art made somewhat to resemble Him, how worthy of envy is thy lot!

CHAPTER XV

Tribulations and Cares of a Loving Soul
(Verses 5, 6 and 7 of Ch. i of the Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—Some consequences of original sin: the acts of uncharitableness of devout persons, persecutions of the worldlings, disturbing cares with which those of her household try to take the little bride away from the thought of God. She turns to Jesus, the good Shepherd, for consolation.

THE fifth verse is only a development of what she said in the preceding one. The bride continues her discourse to the daughters of Jerusalem thus: *Take no notice of my being so brown, it is the sun that has altered my complexion.*

The scorching heat of the sun's rays are a very apt figure of all the tribulations of the present life which, in a very short time strip the soul of all its outward graces of spiritual childhood and of the superficial charms of spiritual youth.

The scorching rays of the sun of the justice of God, incensed against the sin of our first parents, have caused me to forfeit in their persons all the privileges of primitive innocence which they had received and were to transmit to their posterity. Although Baptism super-

vened and blotted out the stain of original sin from my soul, so that I became in Christ the child of God and truly beautiful, nevertheless it has not abolished for the time of the present life certain consequences of this terrible accident of our nature at its origin: I mean a decided inclination to evil, a blindness of the mind, the motion of unruly passions, the being liable to all sorts of accidents, illnesses, infirmities, with the perspective of death at an uncertain date; in one word, all sorts of miseries. All these evils are the common lot of both sinners and saints.

The sons of my mother have fought against me.

As if all the evils already enumerated were not enough, instead of helping one another to bear their burdens, as St. Paul (Gal. vi, 2) exhorts us to do, it happens too often that even persons who make a profession of piety, turn violently against each other, whilst the worldlings all together with one accord league themselves against whomsoever they see endeavouring to lead a life of union with God, and they persecute him. That is why the oracle of the Holy Ghost gives this warning: *Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation.* (Eccl. ii, 7.)

They have made me keeper in the vineyards: my own vineyard I have not kept.

In order to draw a pious soul away from the search after God in contemplation; in order to prevent one from entering the religious state or

holy priesthood, parents and relatives sometimes conspire to overwhelm such a one with all sorts of distracting cares, frivolous occupations, dangerous pleasures, until he is not even left free to attend to himself. Hence this complaint of the bride of the Canticle: *My own vineyard I have not kept.* Added to this cause for anguish there is also this, that a loving and generous soul is always chiding herself for the least want of fidelity to grace. Keeping our own vineyard means keeping watch over our senses, our imagination and all the powers of our soul, as we are going to see in the sequel.

Literature, science, the arts, politics, trade, the pursuit of wealth, the enjoyment of life, worldly success: these are the vineyards where they want to see me toil from morning till night, till the day of my death. But now I am quite resolved to leave to them all these vanities; I want to turn exclusively to Thee, O my only Love, my beloved Bridegroom. O Lord Jesus, do Thou teach me, direct me, tell me where Thou takest Thy repose, where fervent souls take their delights in Thee in the midday. *Show me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou liest in the midday, lest I begin to wander after the flocks of thy companions.*

Jesus is here compared to a shepherd: did He not say, *I am the Good Shepherd?* (John x, 11.) But He is now resting from his heavy work, and the loving soul, like a faithful bride, wants to keep Him company, seat herself at His feet with Magdalen, and listen to Him, adoring Him with her whole heart in silent love.

O thou whom my soul loveth.

Happy the Christian who, in spite of all his shortcomings in the spiritual life, can give himself this testimony that at least he loves Our Lord and loves Him tenderly. The great misfortune of a tepid and negligent Christian is precisely this, that he has no tender affection for Our Lord. All that Jesus has done, and endured for his own personal sake makes not the least impression upon him, evokes not in him the faintest spontaneous movement of gratitude.

Show me where thou feedest, where thou liest in the midday.

The midday for Our blessed Lord is the present time, I mean the space of time extending from the day of His glorious Ascension to the last day of the present state of the world, when He will come with great majesty to judge the living and the dead. He is, in a way, taking some repose after having accomplished the heavy work of our redemption by His dolorous passion and death on the cross; and, moreover, because He does not show Himself any longer in His bodily appearance among men as He did during His earthly life.

Where, therefore, ought we now to look for Him, that we may contemplate Him? Where? Well, first of all at the right hand of the Father in heaven, where He sits in glory surrounded by all the blessed. Besides this trysting place, we may also meet Him in His sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. We are always sure to find Him there, busy feeding His sheep, feeding

them with His flesh and blood, and feeding Himself, so to say, with the delights He takes in their love. Ah! let us hasten, we too, and feed Jesus; let us raise to His sacred lips what causes Him an inexpressible joy, I mean the vessel of a pure heart, overflowing with love, and exhaling the sweet perfume of the most delicate virtues.

Lest I begin to wander after the flocks of thy companions.

In His character of God made man, Our Lord has for companions the rest of men. The flocks of these companions of His are the vanities and follies of this wicked world. Unless one is very careful to follow Christ, there is danger of wandering and losing oneself after the flocks of His companions.

Jesus is the great Shepherd of souls, the only good One. He alone is the true Leader of men, who can save them. But, alas! there are many false Christs, many false leaders, many false shepherds, tricked out *in the clothing of sheep whilst inwardly they are ravening wolves.* (Matt. vii, 15.) Many have the audacity to tell their fellow-men, "Follow me," and they secure a hearing for a time. Journalists, writers, poets, philosophers, heterodox preachers, modernists of every grade, charlatans, demagogues: whither do they lead their flocks? They lead them to perdition. Blind men who rashly undertake the task of leading other blind men: they will fall one upon the other over the edge of the precipice. My God! I do not want to follow such leaders.

O thou fairest among women!

Here at last is Jesus Himself coming upon the scene. What is He going to say? Touched by the fervent appeals of His little bride, His first word is one of praise to her, and of such praise as must thrill her with joy: for it tells so plainly how greatly Jesus is pleased with her.

O thou fairest among women—that is to say fairest among all creatures of this visible universe. St. Francis de Sales says: "Man is the perfection of the universe; the light of reason is the perfection of man; love is the perfection of reason, and charity is the perfection of love. (*Treatise on the Love of God,* book x, ch. i.) There we have, beautifully set down in their proper order and sequence, all the titles of nobility of the Christian, which bear out Our Lord in His proclaiming the fervent soul as *the fairest* of all creatures in this visible world of ours. Human nature is indeed the supreme perfection of the visible world; now, what constitutes the loftiness of our human nature is that it has a soul in the image and likeness of God, that is to say spiritual, intelligent, inexterminable; moreover, what is most entrancingly beautiful about this image of God, is its power of freely clinging to God through love, as to its highest good; finally this sublime faculty of loving God is enhanced in the Christian by the gift of supernatural charity. No sooner has a man been baptised, no sooner has a poor sinner recovered the state of grace, than Our Lord descries in his soul a beauty so great that He cannot restrain Himself for joy. He proclaims how well pleased He is with it: He cries out, *O thou fairest*

among women, fairest among all the creatures of this visible universe!

If thou thyself know not.

If thou know not where I feed my flock, where I lie in the midday. Such is the meaning of the Hebrew phrase, which is translated wrongly because too literally, where Our Lord is made to reply: "If thou know not thyself."

Go forth:

Go out of the house of thine own self-love, deny thyself in accordance with the gospel prescription: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* (Matt. xvi, 24.) Even, if need be, that is to say if thou hast a religious or priestly and apostolical vocation, *go forth* like Abraham *out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house.* (Gen. xii, 1.)—*Hearken, O daughter, and see and incline thy ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house, and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty.* (Ps. xliv, 11-12.) Go forth in perfect disengagement from all things created, in perfect abnegation of all passing and sensual affections.

Follow after the steps of the flocks.

That is to say: consider attentively the wonderful course of nature, and the foot-prints, so to say, which inferior creatures leave behind them as they hasten to accomplish the will of God: these will lead thee up to God, to Myself.

Thus Our Lord teaches His bride to begin her ascent to God by the contemplation of this

visible universe, by the good use of created things, by the well-ordered handling of her own powers.

Again: *Follow after the steps of the flocks* may be taken to mean: Walk in the footsteps of the blessed angels and the saints, imitate their virtues, listen to their teaching. They will lead thee up to Me.

Feed thy kids beside the tents of the shepherds.

Thy kids are thy senses, thy imagination, thy memory, thy intellect and thy free will; all the subtle powers of both thy body and thy soul, which it is thy duty to govern, as a shepherd his flock, and to lead into fertile and salubrious grazing grounds.

The tents of the shepherds here represent the holy Catholic Church on earth, as it has spread itself all over the world. Therein are found splendid grazing grounds, namely the Seven Sacraments, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, *the words of eternal life* (John vi, 69), the examples of the saints, and finally the Beloved Himself. Therein does He take His midday rest, until the end of the present world, for He said: *Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.* (Matt. xxviii, 20.)

The shepherds are: first of all, the Pope, vicar of Christ, to whom Jesus has entrusted the care of the whole flock of the faithful, saying to him in the person of Peter: *Feed my lambs, feed my sheep* (John xxi, 17); then the bishops, successors of the Apostles, to whom Our Lord gave the command: *Teach ye all nations . . . to*

observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. (Matt. xxviii, 20.) Finally the priests, who have the care of souls, and all the spiritual writers approved by the Church. We must be careful never to stray from their doctrinal teaching.

CHAPTER XVI

Jesus extols the charms of His Little Bride

(Verses 8, 9, and 10 of Ch. i of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—The mystical chariot. The bride's cheeks and neck. The God-given chains of gold inlaid with silver.

O MY love.

In thus familiarly addressing his little bride, does not Our Lord show with what ineffable tenderness He cherishes her? We cannot entertain the shadow of a doubt about His sincerity: such are therefore the genuine feelings of His Sacred Heart.

But oh! what a wonder is this, that He who has for Himself the whole heavenly court of the blessed angels and saints, the incomparable love of His sweet mother Mary, the infinite enjoyment of His Heavenly Father and the infinite sweetness of the Holy Spirit, should still condescend to beg for the love of such a poor and lowly handmaid as I am, and wish to take me for His bride! And now His amazing love for his little bride is carried to this excess that He must Himself need to celebrate her praises. He says:

O my love, to my company of horsemen, in Pharao's chariots, have I likened thee.

How glorious must have been King Solomon's cavalry, with the chariots given him as a present by the Egyptian Pharao! But our Solomon is Jesus, the King of heaven: how much more resplendent and glorious must not be the squadrons of His nine choirs of blessed angels, to whom must be added all the orders of the Saints, who have come forth out of the Egypt of this sinful world, and are, so to say, kept under the cart-sheds of Paradise? Our Lord in the transports of His love for a pure and fervent soul does not hesitate to declare that her charms attract Him as irresistibly as those of the blessed inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem: and He shows the genuineness of His feelings towards her by His most sweet condescension. "O my love," says He, "by the admirably disciplined vigour of all thy movements and the swiftness of thy course towards such sublime objects as those of divine contemplation and the performance of all sorts of good works, I find thee comparable to the most noble and spirited coursers which draw my chariots in paradise, when I *ascend upon the cherubim and fly upon the wings of the wind.*" (Ps. xvii, 11.)

Certain chariots of antiquity were drawn by four horses yoked together in one front-line. These were called a *quadriga;* their pace was more a sort of flying than running: it called on the part of the driver for great coolness, dexterity and firmness of grip to avoid upsetting. Now the mystic, that God-bearer or Christophoros, is likened by the heavenly Bridegroom

to Solomon's quadriga, drawing, on His triumphal car, Him who is his only love. The four symbolical horses are 1° the flesh of the mystic. St. Paul tells us: *Glorify and bear God in your bodies* (1 Cor. vi, 20), 2° his imaginative faculty, 3° his memory, 4° finally his intellect. His queen-faculty, the will, is the driver; it is through its exertion that God is thus, freely and with a holy enthusiasm, carried in state in the very midst of a hostile world. This feat wins the admiration, almost the envy, of the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem; for they cannot any longer gain merits, whilst this little soul does not take a single step forward, without giving greater glory to God, increasing her own capacity to love Him throughout all eternity and heaping up to herself a treasure of merits.

Thy cheeks are beautiful as the turtledove's.

We must read into these words a purely spiritual meaning, for Jesus is not an earthly lover, but a heavenly one. He is not sensitive to the charms which come from flesh and blood, but only to such as are produced in the soul by the grace of the Holy Ghost. We have therefore to attribute to the cheeks of the bride a symbolical meaning. Here is the one I propose.

Let us see in the cheeks of the bride, figuratively, the first two theological virtues, faith and hope: full, firm, healthy and beautiful. Indeed how firm and lively and bright is the simple faith of the servant of God, in whatever condition he may happen to be: the faith of the coal-heaver, the faith of the Breton peasant, the faith of many a young Catholic student, the faith of

the holy priest, of the monk and of the nun, the faith of a St. Thomas Aquinas, of a Bernard of Clairvaux, of an Augustine of Hippo; the faith of a Simon Peter, who with firm assurance said to Our Lord: *Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.* (Matt. xvi, 16.) This elicited from Jesus a magnificent reply: *Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven; and I say to thee that thou art Peter* (a rock), *and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it: and I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth it shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth it shall be loosed also in heaven.* (Matt. xvi, 17-19.)

Again, how very firm, lively, luminous and unconquerable is the virtue of hope, of every true servant of God. His trust in the loving mercy of God and in the infinite merits of the Saviour is simply absolute. In many Psalms, but most particularly in the one hundred and seventeenth, David gives the most varied and wonderful expression to his hope in the Lord. Then see how Saint Peter presents a fine demonstration of his unshakable trust in our Lord. After he had had the great misfortune of thrice denying his divine Master, at the crow of the cock he came to his senses again, and full of repentance he wept bitterly; then on Easter morning we see him as eager as St. John to find Jesus dead or alive: so absolute a trust had he in His mercy. All the poor sinners of the world, after even the most lamentable falls, were they even

repeated hundreds and thousands of times, have in Peter a most encouraging example of sorrow for sin and of the virtue of hope. Indeed the mercies of Our Lord are inexhaustible: as a matter of fact they are infinite. The worst of sinners has still the power of giving great joy to Our Lord, by his return to Him. The Prodigal has no sooner confessed his sin with tears of repentance than his heavenly Father gives him the kiss of peace and reconciliation, gives him back the white robe of innocence, and proclaims him as much a member of the heavenly family as if nothing had happened.

After Jesus has sung the praise of the faith and hope of His bride, it is only natural that He should proceed to celebrate her charity. He does it under this graceful image: *Thy neck*, he says, is beautiful *as jewels*. Just as the neck is the support of the head, thus is charity the support of everything that is noble in a Christian. Charity is at the same time the pivot upon which turn all the manifestations of his supernatural life, as well those which have God directly for their object as those whose object is the love of one's neighbour. Just, therefore, as the suppleness and flexibility of the neck allows a man to raise his eyes to heaven or cast them down upon his fellow pilgrims and all inferior creatures, and to look either closely or at a distance, to the right or to the left, just so does charity, the third and noblest of the theological virtues, render a Christian capable of all sorts of good works, and make him gain innumerable and most varied merits which adorn him as so many jewels of great price.

There is yet another meaning, perhaps even more mystical, to read into the words: *Thy cheeks are beautiful as the turtle-dove's.* We may look upon them as a delicate way which Our Lord has of praising the chastity of all persons consecrated to Him by the practice of the Evangelical Counsels. What constitutes the exquisite loveliness of the cheeks of such a bride of Christ, is that those cheeks will not be offered to the kisses of an earthly husband and of children born of an earthly marriage: because for the love of Jesus, who is the only object of her affections, this little bride deprives herself of the most pure and legitimate, though inferior, pleasures of family life. Body and soul, she dedicates herself wholly to Him alone: and it is such a free renunciation of all joy in the creature which confers on her a supreme touch of loveliness in the eyes of her heavenly Bridegroom. In heaven, the virgins of either sex form the escort and guard of honour of the divine Lamb. (Apoc. xiv, 4.) It is their exclusive privilege to follow Him whithersoever He goes, singing the while a canticle which no one else can repeat.

We will make thee chains of gold, inlaid with silver.

We, that is to say the three divine Persons of the Blessed Trinity. If it be the heavenly Bridegroom who speaks these words, we must understand that He does it not only in His own name, but also in the name of the other two divine Persons. But it seems more natural to suppose that the three divine Persons together

speak these words: *We will make thee chains of gold,* just as at the dawn of the history of the world, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost deliberated and said together: *Let us make man to our image and likeness* (Gen. i, 26); that is to say: Let us give man that which is the very foundation of his nobility and goodness, to wit, a spiritual nature, intelligent and free. Now that it is a question of adorning the Christian soul more and more, the three divine Persons work together to this end.

Although this is the first place in the Canticle of Canticles where a direct allusion to the Blessed Trinity is made, we must, however, take it for granted that, in the mind of the inspired writer, the thought of the three divine Persons is never absent a single moment, on account of the nature of the heavenly Bridegroom. Is He not the Word? the Word of the Father? the Word who, conjointly with the Father, eternally produces the Holy Spirit? We must, in our thought, in our contemplation, in our effusions of love, never fail to keep Our Lord united to His divine Father and His Holy Spirit, since He is in reality inseparable from either, being one and the same God with them.

Is it not precisely in order to introduce us into the circle of the divine life of the Blessed Trinity that Jesus comes to us? Is it not with this object in view that the Father and the Son communicate to us their Holy Spirit? Is it not for this very end that the Holy Spirit comes down to take up His dwelling in the very centre of our being, in the most secret part of our soul? Hence whosoever, in the transports of his piety, does

not raise his eyes and affections still higher than the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord, nay, beyond the divine personality of the Word, even to the most Holy Trinity, has not yet so much as begun to understand what it is to love Jesus.

Let us never lose sight of what follows upon the fact of the divine nature of our heavenly Bridegroom. This great dogma of the divinity of Our Lord enables us to apprehend the mystery of the three divine Persons in their relations with the fervent soul: it shows us how indeed the whole love of God comes to her, the whole Blessed Trinity enters within her, through our Lord Jesus Christ, *per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum*, that is to say, by the very fact of her nuptial union with Christ. Thy heavenly Bridegroom, O Christian soul, is given thee by the Father, and it is His Holy Spirit who consecrates thee to Him, rendering thee not unworthy of His chaste embraces.

We will make thee chains of gold.

What are those chains of gold but the moral infused virtues, summed up in the four cardinal ones of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude? They hold together as the links of a collar, they always accompany the theological virtue of Charity and set its beauty even as a gold chain on a neck as white as ivory. Now just as the brightness of gold shines the more for being inlaid with silver, so the Christian's moral infused virtues receive greater lustre from their being accompanied with the corresponding natural and acquired virtues, which are inferior to the infused ones as silver is to gold.

In the just man, who according to the Apostle *lives by faith* (Heb. x, 38) the natural acquired virtues are inseparable from the supernatural infused ones: that is why the three divine Persons say: *We will make thee chains of gold inlaid with silver.*

CHAPTER XVII

Of the Virtue of Compunction

(Verses 11, 12 and 13 of Ch. i of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—That a fervent soul does not cease to grieve for her past sins though forgiven; and yet Our Lord is grateful to her for having procured Him an occasion of exercising His mercy. How a season of tears can be procured; and of the delights to be found in the contemplation of Jesus crucified.

WHILE the King was at his repose my spikenard sent forth its perfume.

From a shepherd, as He was represented to us in the preceding verses, behold our Jesus is become a King again; King of angels and men, immortal King of ages: He lies in state on His bed of repose, in the glory of paradise.

We have already noted that the midday repose of King Jesus extends from the time of His Ascension even to the end of the world, when He will come to judge the living and the dead. He seems to be asleep. He does not appear to intervene any longer in the events of history; the bride, however, is well aware that He has His eyes upon her and that the delicate perfume of her virtues, especially of her humility and compunction, mounts up to His very throne.

My spikenard sent forth its perfume.

Spikenard is a precious ointment much used in the East. The fervent soul makes it the image of her sorrow for past sins. She keeps green her repentance for having ever offended the divine Majesty, perhaps grievously, perhaps repeatedly, possibly hundreds or even thousands of times. She is well aware that God in his ineffable mercy has forgiven them as soon as absolution supervened; but as for herself she will never, to her last breath, forgive herself, the horrible misfortune she has had of wounding Divine Love. Now this spirit of holy compunction greatly pleases Our Lord. It is as the smell of the perfume of great price which Mary Magdalen once poured out together with her tears upon the feet of the Saviour, and at another time over His sacred head, whilst He was at table; the sweet odour of which has filled the house of Holy Church.

Understand who can, but it is true that Jesus loves His little bride even on account of the sins He has had to forgive her. He is quite grateful for the occasion she thus gave Him to exercise His mercy. Our Jesus is really too good, beyond all limits of discretion: but that is His nature and I am not ashamed to be benefited by it.

But how marvellous this is! In heaven Our Lord will draw His glory from every one of His elect: from those who will have persevered in innocence, precisely because they will have led immaculate, irreprehensible lives (O blessed ones!) and then also, from those miserable sinners, of whom I am one, who will have

offended Him grievously and often; precisely for this reason that they will have given Him the joy of making a display of the magnificence of His mercies. Therefore, never ought any past sin, provided it has been duly absolved, to stand in the way of our giving free rein to the transports of our love of Jesus, or damp our familiar intercourse with Him and our absolute trust in His mercy.

O dear Lord Jesus, King of Love: neither earth nor heaven, neither the blessed angels nor all the saints together with Thy most sweet Virgin Mother Mary, neither time nor eternity, will ever praise Thee enough in my estimation for that immense charity of Thine. Happily, Thou art to Thyself Thine own praise, wholly sufficient. O my Beloved, I offer Thyself to Thyself. I offer to Thee Thy five Wounds which Thou didst receive when Thou wert atoning for my most vile sins. To this precious offering allow me to join that of my sincere repentance.

O my dear reader, you who are perusing these lines: perhaps there is just one thing wanting for you thoroughly to enter into the spirit of the Canticle of Canticles, namely, a season of tear-shedding. You should make a sorrowful review of all the guilty past, with or without a general confession, according as your spiritual director may advise. But I would have you shed tears, real, burning tears of shame and sorrow, springing up from a broken heart, deliciously shed over your holy crucifix, in the secret of your chamber. It is evident that before one should dare to request, as does the bride of the Canticle in her

very first words, the ecstatic joy of the kiss of the lips of Our Lord, it is proper that the novice in the spiritual life should first of all spend some time in kissing His sacred feet with Mary Magdalen, shedding over them copious tears. Such is, at any rate, the advice of St. Bernard.

It is because he ignored or neglected this first exercise of a lively and persevering repentance for his sins, that many a beginner in the career of sanctity, who seemed ever so promising, has pitifully failed in the end.

A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me.

This compunction is excited in the loving soul, especially by the contemplation of the sorrowful passion of Our Lord *Jesus Christ and Him crucified.* (1 Cor. ii, 2.) Such is the bundle of myrrh, of a holy and purifying bitterness, which she wears constantly upon her heart. As though she said: Jesus crucified will ever be the object of all my deliberate thoughts and of my burning affections.

A cluster of kofer my love is to me in the vineyards of Engaddi.

Such is the translation given by the learned. The kofer, they say, is a shrub whose flowers bloom in clusters and exhale the perfume of mignonette. As the kofer or kennet of the Arabians is unknown to me, I own I much prefer to see in this text the symbolism of a cluster of grapes. Engaddi was famous in those days for its vineyards.

Not only is Jesus crucified a bundle of myrrh, and the most efficacious means of constantly

compelling my tears and groans of genuine, heartfelt sorrow over my past sins, but He is moreover, immediately after the essence of the Most Holy Trinity, the sweetest, the most delectable object of contemplation which may engross the attention of a fervent Christian. Yes, the contemplation of the sorrowful Passion and of the ineffable love of my Saviour quenches my thirst even as a lovely bunch of grapes that of a thirsty traveller. Indeed, is there anywhere a man who could feed upon this bunch of grapes, that is to say who could sedulously apply his mind to the consideration of the sacred Passion of Our Lord in all its details, without finding his thirst for love fully allayed?

O man, thou reasonable creature, who hast also been endowed with an exquisite sensitiveness, thy heart cannot do without love of some kind: now what more noble and delightful object for thee to love could there ever be than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and thy very own brother, suffering and dying for thee on the cross? Then again, thou art longing to feel that someone cares for thee; then plunge thyself in the deep waters of thy Saviour's Passion, in the crimson tidal wave of His sacred blood. Bear in mind that it is all for thee, for thee personally and individually, for thy sake, for thy love even as though thou wert the only one He cared for, that He has endured all these humiliating and atrocious torments. He would indeed be hard to please, the man, whosoever he might be, who, attentively meditating upon these great truths, would not feel that he has indeed therein full scope for loving and being loved.

When we are thus well pleased with the Sacred Humanity of our dear Saviour, we are imitating our heavenly Father Himself. We will do well to meditate upon these words of St. Francis de Sales in his treatise on the Love of God (Book ii, ch. 5.) "Generally, people plant vineyards only in view of the grapes they will produce; therefore the grapes are the first things desired and intended, although leaves and flowers are produced before them. In the same way our great Saviour was the first object of the divine will in the eternal plan which divine providence wrought for the production of all creatures: it was in view of this desirable fruit that God planted the vineyard of the universe: then He ordered the succession of many generations, which, like so many leaves and flowers, were to go before and prepare and foretell the production of this marvellous cluster of grapes which the holy bride celebrates in the Canticles, the juice of which inebriates God and men."

CHAPTER XVIII

Mutual Benevolence of the Bridegroom and the Bride

(Verses 14, 15 and 16 of Ch. i of the Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—When speaking of His child-bride, Jesus takes His wishes for realities. The cross is the nuptial couch whereon the Divine Word will espouse her. All things are in common between these two lovers. What is meant by their houses and the rafters of cypress trees.

ON hearing the expressions of the passionate love of His child-bride, Jesus is touched to the heart. In an outburst of tender emotion He exclaims: *Behold, thou art fair, my love, behold thou art fair; thy eyes are as those of doves.*

In these words of praise which Our Lord bestows upon his child-bride, who is as yet but on the threshold of the race-course of sanctity, we must understand that He takes His wishes as already accomplished facts. This little soul—let us say it is our own—is, alas! as yet very far indeed from perfection, but the all-consuming charity of our divine Lover makes Him see her already in that degree of perfection to which He intends to lead her. No sooner has a soul begun fervently to love Jesus than He finds in her

an irresistible attractiveness. Here is some consolation for those who might be tempted with discouragement at sight of their present miseries and shortcomings.

The eyes of the bride which are *as those of doves*, are the first two theological virtues of faith and hope, by which she keeps the glance of her soul firmly set upon the adorable person and all the mysteries of her Well-Beloved. From such an assiduous contemplation of Our Lord, the eyes of the soul take to themselves a brightness and liveliness which makes them very beautiful. Nevertheless, on hearing herself thus praised by her divine Spouse, the bride promptly rejoins:

Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, and comely.

As who would say: Ah! my dear Lord Jesus, do not, I beg of Thee, give me such high praise. Thou alone, O my love, Thou alone deservest to be praised for Thine infinite loveliness. *Tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus Altissimus.* Alone art Thou holy, alone art Thou the Lord, alone art Thou the Most High, with the Holy Spirit, in the Father's glory!

Our bed is flourishing.

The couch whereon the Word of God, our Bridegroom, espouses the fervent soul, is none other than His cross. This couch He chose for Himself, ostentatiously to lie thereon as upon a couch of state, strewn with flowers. On this couch, His cross, He expects me to lavish upon Him the passionate tokens of my love and to unite myself to Him. It is when on the Cross that Our Lord wins all the hearts which have not the hardness of flint; there it is that he ac-

complishes His mystical espousal with the Christian soul who is not afraid to embrace mortification, to accept pain from all hands: from God, from men, from self; to inflict on herself voluntary penances. It is related in Exodus (iv, 26) that when Sephora, the wife of Moses, found herself obliged hastily to circumcise her boy with her own hands, she exclaimed: O Moses, *a blood-stained spouse art thou to me!* With much more reason may the loving soul give this title to Our Lord:

Sponsus sanguinum; A blood-stained spouse!

This does not prevent her from proclaiming: *Our bed is strewn with flowers;* with roses, and lilies, and violets and laburnums, and hyacinths and bunches of lilac . . . that is to say with the flowers of all virtues: charity, self-abnegation, humility, purity, simplicity. Every drop of the sacred blood of Jesus and every thorn of mortification of the generous Christian are changed, on the nuptial couch of the Cross, into flowers whose lovely colours will never fade, and whose delicate perfume keeps for ever spreading far and wide and rising upwards to the very throne of God.

And now consider the amazing audacity of love. The bride begins to talk as though all the goods of the heavenly Spouse were also her very own. What splendid assurance sounds in these words: *The beams of our houses are of cedar, our rafters of cypress-trees.* So vivid is her faith, so firm her hope; her charity so full-hearted and irrevocable, that henceforth all goods are held in common between her and her Be-

loved. Whatever she may call her own, whatever she is in herself, she has abandoned into His hands, never to claim it back; and as He, on His part, gives Himself up so entirely and with such tender affection to her, it is no presumption on the part of the child-bride to consider all the goods of her Beloved as her own as well. They live together under the marital regimen of holding all they have in common.

Now what can those houses be which she mentions, and of which the beams are of cedar and the rafters of cypress-trees? These are, first of all, the Church Militant, with its indestructible hierarchy composed of the Pope, Bishops and Priests; then, within the Church, if the bride happen to be a religious, the Order or pious Institute to which she belongs and which is made firm and solid by the approbation of the Holy See; finally, and above all, the heavenly Jerusalem whereat the fervent Christian burns with desire to arrive one day, and wherein he already lives in spirit. The perfection of charity which is the rule there and the unfailing enjoyment of the beatific vision both of Our Lord's Sacred Humanity and of the Most Holy Trinity, are aptly figured by the incorruptible and perfumed woods of the cedar and the cypress-tree.

O Christian soul, who art the conscious and willing and loving bride of the Lord Jesus, take pleasure in repeating these words of the Canticle: *The beams of our houses are of cedar, our rafters of cypress-trees.* Let it be thy delight to meditate on the splendid history of the Holy Catholic Church, and on the glories of thy own religious Institute; but most of all on the

gorgeousness of the heavenly Jerusalem, where thy Beloved will share with thee all His treasures, and where thou shalt love Him perfectly.

CHAPTER XIX

Flower of the Field, Lily of the Valleys

(Verses 1 and 2 of Ch. ii of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—The blessed Host compared to the Easter-daisy. Of what valleys Jesus is the lily.

IT is not clear, for there is nothing to indicate it, whether it is the Bridegroom or His child-bride who speaks these words: *I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valley.* They suit both equally well, though in a different way. Therefore we may apply them first to Our Lord, and then to the fervent soul. We can even imagine that both the Bridegroom and the bride, one after the other, made these words their own. We may suppose without an undue stretch of probabilities, that this phrase was thus twice repeated, in the original Hebrew text, and that in the course of time some ignorant or blundering copyist, failing to perceive the meaning of such a repetition, simply suppressed it. We should then have in the first three verses of the second chapter of Canticle a short, but very lively, dialogue in this wise:

Jesus: *I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys.*

The Fervent Soul: Nay, my Love: is it

not rather *I* who *am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys?*

JESUS: Indeed *as the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*

THE CHILD-BRIDE: And *as the apple-tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons of men.*

It is worthy of remark that on the one hand many interpreters place these words: *I am the flower of the field* on the lips of the Bride, whilst on the other hand the sacred liturgy, in many passages, makes an apt application of them to Our Lord.

How is it possible for Our Lord to describe Himself under such a lowly figure as that of the daisy? a graceful flower, it is true, but one which does not seem to suit the sovereign Majesty! Let us see. The modest daisy, with its heart of gold and white coronal of petals, seems a smile of God fallen upon our earth, to rejoice the hearts of the little ones. It offers itself to any hand that wants to pluck it, be it the hand of the wayfarer, of the mendicant, or of the little child. Now is it not a fact that our Jesus has made Himself, in the Holy Eucharist, as much at hand to everyone as this flower of the field? The Blessed Host is to be found everywhere in the whole world, in all the churches of our towns and villages, and even in the rude log-cabins or huts of reeds which serve as chapels in the forests of the New World or in the heart of Africa. Then also, the Vicar of Christ, our Holy Father the Pope, invites, nay urges, every Christian without any discrimination of age or social condition, provided only they be in a state

of grace and approach with a pure intention, to cull this heavenly flower every morning, if they like, in order to sweeten with its ineffable perfume their day's drudgery.

The blessed host is circular and flat and light, even as a daisy whose golden heart should be veiled with white. As much as the Easter daisy by the wayside, Jesus is silent in the Holy Eucharist. There are those who cull it reverently with ardent love and lay it on their heart of hearts: 'tis a minority. By far the larger number pass Him by in utter indifference, unseeing or not deeming Him worthy a moment's attention. And, alas! there are those who are not afraid rudely to pluck this heavenly flower, to bruise it, to throw it in the mud, to trample upon it. I ask: "O my dearest Lord, why art Thou exposing Thy sweet divine Majesty to such indignities?" He replies: "My child, 'tis for love, all for love. That I might be enabled to come to thee and to every one who will receive Me in his heart with joy, I had to run this risk. A flower in the field in very truth; this is what I am."

I propose yet another interpretation of these words: *Flower of the field.*

Jesus being the Divine Word is, so to say, the very flower of the Divine Essence; a flower which without intervention of any husbandman, has from all eternity sprung and bloomed in the vast verdant field of the infinite perfections of the Heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit is the sweet perfume emanating both from this marvellous flower, the Son of God, and from the

field which spontaneously produces it, namely the Heavenly Father.

Lily of the valleys.

We may first of all understand as the valleys of which Jesus is the lily, the two blessed eternities, that *a parte ante*, as the theologians call it, and that *a parte post*. The first is eternity as we conceive it in God before He created anything; an eternity in which, according to our way of speaking, God lived with Himself, perfectly self-sufficing, having no need of any one or anything whatsoever outside His own Divine Essence, enjoying an infinite bliss in the inviolate Trinity of His Persons. Jesus, in His character of the Word or the Son of the Father, is the lily of that first valley. Then He is also the lily of that other valley, the eternity *a parte post*, in which He deigns to associate with His own sanctity and bliss, the creatures He has made to His own image and likeness, angels first, and then men. Now in either of these two eternities, Jesus, because He is the splendour of the Father, first as the pure Divine Word, then as the Word made flesh, is a fragrant lily, whose ineffable beauty is a charm to the eyes of the contemplative and loving soul.

We may also liken the two Testaments to two fertile valleys where Jesus is equally to be found; in the Old, He is under cover of the promises, prophetic figures and theophanies, that is to say, divine apparitions to the prophets. In the New Testament we meet Him in His own adorable Person and the union of His two natures. And He is indeed a lily, this Son of

the Virgin, who is God; a lily of incomparable majesty, of dazzling whiteness, rejoicing heaven and earth with the penetrating sweetness of His perfume.

Finally we may also see in the valleys where Jesus flourishes as a lily, first the human individual nature of the Virgin Mary, which on the scale of creation is inferior to the angels; then the deep valley of her humility; a humility so profound that all her ineffable privileges of an immaculate conception, absolute sinlessness, positive sanctity so great that it is second only to that of God, and divine motherhood itself, could not raise her in her own estimation above the rank of a handmaid. *Behold,* she said to the Archangel Gabriel, *the handmaid of the Lord.* (Luke i, 38.) Then in her *Magnificat,* her retort to the praises bestowed upon her by St. Elizabeth is: *He* (the Lord) *hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaid.* (Luke i, 48.) Jesus is the lily which sprung up just where those two valleys meet.

Finally let us note that under those two charming images of the *flower of the field and the lily of the valleys,* Our Lord describes once more to us His two natures, the human and the divine. His own divine nature which He has from the Eternal Father whose Son He is; and His own human nature which He took in the chaste womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, His sweet Mother.

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

A fervent soul whose love of Jesus is genuine,

and who for His dear sake keeps herself unspotted, is in the midst of tepid, negligent and sinful souls, even as a lily among thorns.

CHAPTER XX

In the Shade of the Apple-Tree

(Verses 3 and 4 of Ch. ii of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—How refreshing and delightful is the contemplation of Jesus. That the Wine-cellar of Jesus is His Sacred Heart.

AS the apple-tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons.

The trees of the forest or crab-stocks, produce only bitter fruits, unfit for the nourishment or refreshment of man. So is the case with men in comparison with Our Divine Lord. Of themselves, and unless they be grafted upon Jesus Christ, they produce only bitter fruits. He alone is the healthy food and refreshment of souls.

From the sole point of view of nature, it is a noble thing for a man to carry within himself some grand idea and, so to say, live upon it. So does a man of genius, whether he be a poet, an historian, a philosopher or an artist. He can afford to despise the sordid preoccupations of other men and have nothing to do with them; he finds within himself a fount of entrancing joys, worthy of the elevation of his mind and of the exquisite sensitiveness of his heart. But when the idea with which a man lives and upon

which he feeds in the secret of his heart is God, the living and life-giving Idea, who is at the same time the grandest and also the very sweetest of realities, and when this Idea-Reality presents Itself to us as does the Divine Word, clad in the garment of our human nature, living and suffering, dying for us and loving us as never did any other man live and suffer and love and die; oh! then how the fervent contemplative is entranced, and inebriated and satiated with ineffable delights!

That is why the bride, after having likened Our Lord to an apple-tree, adds: *I sat down under His shade, whom I desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate.* This the bride does whenever she seeks, in the peaceful contemplation of her Beloved, some relief from the burning and parching ardours of the active life. Yes, I shall proclaim it to His praise, I have found in the contemplation of the mysteries of my Saviour, ever fresh and inexpressible delights. Just as when after choosing, by sight and touch of the hand, the best fruits hanging on an apple-tree, we carry them to our mouth to taste them and enjoy their sweetness, just in the same way do we taste and enjoy in the depth of our soul the life-giving truths which our mind has culled in the course of holy reading and meditation.

He brought me into His cellar of wine.

The cellar of wine of Our Lord is His Sacred Passion. Oh what generous wine is all the blood He has shed for us with such prodigality, and which He offers every day to all who want to drink it, in the blessed sacrament of the Holy

Eucharist! *Drink ye all of this, for this is My blood.* (Matt. xxvi, 27-28.) Again, the wine-cellar is His most Sacred Heart, which is the very head-spring of His precious blood. The lance of the soldier has opened for everyone a free entrance to it.

Communion of some sort is in very deed the law which prevails all over nature, whether animate or inanimate. Any tree, any plant, which ceases to absorb the life-giving juices extracted from mother earth, promptly dies. Any animal which happens to be deprived of its proper nutriment wastes away and dies. In the case of man, this natural law of his living and feeding upon the things that are inferior to him, serves to ennoble, and in a way to deify, the whole material universe; because when we absorb some food, we change it into our very self, into our own substance. Then we eat at Holy Communion, the Blessed Host, that *Living Bread* which is the very flesh and blood of our Lord; only, to our unspeakable joy, it happens that instead of our changing this divine food into our own substance, it, on the contrary, changes us, into Christ, makes us a part of Him—His living branches.

CHAPTER XXI

The Order of Charity

(4th verse of Ch. ii of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—In what this order consists, and how it expands the heart of man. The evil of an unlawful passion. An answer to the objection of worldlings when they say that whosoever has not experienced love as they understand it, is ignorant of real life.

He set in order charity in me.

That is to say: He has set charity supreme in me; He has set my affections in order; He has subjected them all to the control and command of divine love.

The order of charity is that I should first of all love God for His own sake, above all things; and that I should love all other persons and things only in reference to Him, for His sake, and in Him: first of all myself, then my parents, teachers, benefactors both spiritual and temporal, the poor, the afflicted, the sick, not forgetting my enemies, and finally all men. So much for those on earth. But our spirit of faith must make us rise higher still and extend our charitable compassion to all the holy souls in Purgatory, nay, it ought to take us up into the eternal dwellings of Paradise, and cause us joyfully to

share the bliss of the angels and saints. Thus is expanded the heart of good will where Jesus has put everything in order.

May we take the liberty of briefly touching here upon the subject of unlawful passion? For it is a lamentable fact that anything may happen and does happen on this earth of ours. Not only does an almost infinite number of Christians refuse to enter into the plan of divine Love in their behalf, but it may even happen, sometimes, that persons who have freely consecrated themselves to God will suddenly fall, to the great scandal of all who witness it. Still, whenever such a mishap occurs, we should bear in mind that, as our Lord warns us, along with the *wise virgins* of the parable, there were also the *foolish ones*. Jesus did not think it beneath Him to notice this peculiar feature in the history of His future Church. (Matt. xxv, 1-11.)

One of these unfortunate beings will give as an excuse: "But I feel such a craving for loving and being loved!" which being translated into plain language should read thus: "Alas! during a more or less protracted period, I have ceased to *watch and pray* and be on my guard; and now I find myself so goaded on by carnal lusts that I do not know how to overcome them." This would be a truer statement of facts. Poor silly creature! loved indeed you are, infinitely, divinely; and as for loving, who stays you from so doing? A race-course of love is wide open and stretches out before you to an infinite extent. But that is not any longer what she wants. There was a time when Jesus was to her the all-sufficing Love, but that time is past. *Hear, O ye*

heavens, and give ear, O earth, and ye angels and saints of paradise, listen and be amazed: This person, one day, gave herself to God and God gave Himself to her, and now she wants to go back on this stupendous exchange! God does not any longer please her.

God does not please her!

Ah! the trouble is that God offers no delight to the senses. God does not bestow coarse endearments. Now this person has, rather late in life, discovered that this is precisely the kind of thing she wants; that is what she calls loving and being loved. That Jesus died for her on the Cross, that He gives Himself to be her food in Holy Communion, that He vouchsafed to become her Bridegroom and promises her special, highly coveted, privileges in His paradise of glory: all that counts for nothing; one does not feel that one is being loved wonderfully. But to receive on both cheeks and give back with interest the sort of kisses that fond parents bestow upon their darlings, ah! that is the thing! this indeed is loving and being loved!

Great boobies! What a sorry figure you cut! Why, then, did you ever enter religion? or why did you ever present yourself for Holy Orders and become priests? One asks: Is it perchance that they were mistaken as to their vocation? No, no! Do not you believe it. Most of the time such is not the case. All went well in the beginning. We can but repeat with St. Paul: *O senseless Galatians, who hath bewitched you? You did run well: who hath hindered you that you should cease to obey the*

truth? (Gal. iii, i; v, 7.) All went well in the beginning, but there came a time when they lent a pleased ear to the persistent rigmarole of the tempter, and they would covet what was not good for them; they ceased to be faithful to their plighted love. It is the history of our first parents over again; over again, the history of the traitor Apostle, Judas.

Worldlings show themselves astounded, nay scandalized, when we tell them that the love of God is above and subdues and sanctifies all other loves; and that, in the case of persons consecrated to God, it supplants and takes the place of the natural love of those who *marry and are given in marriage*. This they cannot take, they cannot believe it. They look upon us priests, nuns or monks, as either so many blind persons or so many fools. Above all they consider us as suffering a great privation, and they pity us, as though our life were loveless and empty. For them love is solely and exclusively sexual concupiscence—an affair of the senses. To love God, to love Him with a bridal love wholly spiritual, to wed Him and be wedded to Him, seems to them as chimerical, as impossible as to catch the moon with one's teeth. Hardly do they discern in such expressions anything beyond some figures of speech, some bold rhetorical tropes which ought not to be taken literally. And I really give them up as hopeless.

But whether they can see it or not, it remains true that God wants to be so loved, I mean supremely and with nuptial love, by every Christian soul, even here below, even though they

be engaged in legitimate human wedlock; and that moreover God calls a certain number of souls to the service of His altar and to divers religious orders, to be His exclusively and to make of Him alone, even during the present life, their All-in-all. Blessed are those chosen and called to such a life; blessed indeed, if only they be faithful!

Here is the way this kingly Lover proceeds. He sets a regular siege to the heart of the Christian, generally early in life; and when He has conquered and so to say captured all his affections, He pledges His faith to him and unites him to Himself by a mystical betrothal; and soon after, if He should find him generously responsive to His love, He adorns his soul with the jewels of the most precious virtues, and celebrates His marriage with that soul and lives with her as the husband with his wife. I repeat it: we shall never get people who appreciate only the things of flesh and blood to understand this: *The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him and he cannot understand.* (1 Cor. ii, 14.) Well, all we can say is that the Canticle of Canticles was never written for such Christians, supposing that they can still be called Christians; nor is it for such as they that it has been inserted by the Church into the canon of Holy Scriptures, and woven into the web of the sacred liturgy.

I have been told sometimes with a considerable amount of scornful reproachfulness: Oh you, monk, you have never loved; you cannot

know what it is like. You were in your teens when you entered the cloister; during your whole life you have scorned woman's love; something is wanting to you. You know not what love is, you have not really lived to the full extent and meaning of the word. My answer is:

I beg your pardon, but I must contradict you.

If I may be allowed to give testimony in my own behalf, I am conscious of having lived really and fully and intensely. I think I can say that I have lived a very great deal. For one thing, I have loved and loved much. I have loved certainly more than if I had fallen in love with a perfect woman and made her my wife and had of her all earthly happiness and many beautiful children; yes I have loved even more than would have then been the case. Does that surprise you, my friend? Then it is you yourself who do not understand what love is.

You stumble upon this narrow and indigent notion of a purely human love and cannot get away from it. Let me assure you that there is another kind of love, which takes hold of the heart and the senses, to say nothing of the purely spiritual part of our being, far more forcibly than anything created could ever do. *My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God*, sings David. (Ps. lxxxiii, 3.) Is there need of proving this? Is not this truth brighter than the noonday sun? True, its very brightness only serves to dazzle the bat's eyes and owl's eyes of worldlings. O you, who are wise according to the world, stay where you are, in your own wisdom, and in your darkness. It were cruelty to try to enlighten you; because

a vivid light causes intolerable pain to sore eyes. But at least do not try to force the *children of light* themselves, against their will, to become like you, bats and owls of darkness. *We are the children of the light: Filii lucis.* (1 Thess. v, 5.)

Besides, do you really think that an elderly priest is quite ignorant of what purely natural love is? For him to be so, it were necessary that he should have passed through life with his eyes and ears stopped. During half a century of priestly activity have I not met lovers by the score, and observed them before and during and after the thunderbolt of what you call *la grande passion*? Have I not had to read from time to time in your newspapers horrid details of domestic tragedies? Out of a stern sense of duty and to my intense disgust, I have been obliged to read some of the day's most famous novels, where adultery is celebrated on the lyric mode, where marriage as God instituted it is derided, where divorce is perched as from the house-tops and the free love of dogs without a master or of monkeys in the equatorial forests is held up as the ideal. Besides all this, in my capacity of spiritual father, I have received confidences which have opened my eyes upon the miseries which beset human love even of the purest and most legitimate kind.

In very truth, I ask myself sometimes, whether an aged priest does not know more on this subject than all the lovers in the world. For it is not the man who is caught as a fish in the meshes of human love, who has the better knowledge of it all; he, poor man, does not understand any-

thing beyond the fact that he is no more master of himself. But the man who sees the whole thing from outside, who is a calm, dispassionate and disinterested spectator, whose lucidity of vision is enhanced by the help of a special grace for the guidance of others, this is the man who understands and can say: I know all about it.

No indeed, I am not ignorant of what human love is. I could, if I chose, write a novel. And without wishing in the least to disparage human love—for I think highly of it, whenever it does not stray from the right path—I am so far from finding myself an object of self pity because, for the love of God, I have deprived myself of the sweets of woman's love, that I have caught myself congratulating myself and saying: "Well, well; we have had a lucky escape!" I cannot enough thank Our Lord that He has been pleased to take all the room in my heart, leaving none for other affections; *Ordinavit in me caritatem.* May He be blessed for ever!

CHAPTER XXII

Love Languors

(Verses 5, 6, 7, 8, of Ch. ii of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—Flowers and fruits. The left hand and the right of the Bridegroom. The soul asleep. How Jesus protects her repose. How even in her sleep she hears His voice.

STAY me up with flowers, compass me about with apples, because I languish with love.

Let us begin with the last words—*I languish with love*—that is to say I am consumed with passionate desire; and He whom I so fondly, ardently love, hides from me His sweet countenance. Hence these sighs, which I cannot restrain.

It were only right that all Christians should, from a full heart, incessantly heave sighs of love of God during their exile here below. They should be seen wandering here and there at random, with no other end in view than to give utterance to their pent-up feelings, as though wounded and incapable of stopping the bleeding, and as who could only grow weaker and weaker. If such be not the case with us, if we have not yet received full tilt in our heart the piercing arrow of divine love, it is because we have not as yet entered into the ways of divine contem-

plation. If, on the other hand, like the bride of the Canticle, we are languishing with love, then we shall exclaim with her—*Stay me up with flowers.*

In his *Treatise on The Love of God,* Book v, Ch. ix, St. Francis de Sales discerns in these words and those which follow, a pressing invitation addressed by the bride to all creatures to join her in the praise of God. Let me refer readers to this chapter. Let them read it attentively: they will find themselves deeply edified by it; and if perchance they should feel inclined to read and reread, not only chapter ix, but the whole Book v, or still better the whole treatise, it will be to their advantage; for there goes out of it a pure flame of divine love.

St. Francis de Sales is an eminent philosopher and theologian, a genuine poet in prose, a master writer and a quaint and charming story-teller; above all he is a mystic among mystics. He is the writer on the spiritual life whom I would most warmly recommend, because he is so nearly akin to our modern mentality. But, O my God, what confusion is it not for me, wretch, to dare to be writing on this sacred Epithalamium of divine love, the Canticle of Canticles, after such geniuses as St. Francis de Sales, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Gregory the Great, to name but these few! My only excuse is that having read and reread the works of these saints and having imbued myself with the Holy Scriptures, there is perhaps some hope that, in spite of all, my readers will still find in these pages, which I write with a trembling hand, some faint echo of their noble teach-

ings. This much by way of parenthesis. Now let us take up the thread of our paraphrase.

Stay me up with flowers.

The flowers of pious sentiments and of holy discourses. Sentiments, discourses, be they ever so holy, are still but flowers; pleasing to the eye and to the sense of smell, figuratively speaking; stimulating to the soul, up to a certain degree, but which can bear no comparison with the ripe and luscious fruits of good works. That is why these words are added:

Compass me about with apples.

Compass me about and load me with an abundance of the fruits of good works; show me something for me to do for the dear love of Christ; either to comfort the sorrowing, or to visit the sick and those in prison, or teach the ignorant, or form little children to the practice of virtue, or serve "our lords" the poor, as they were styled in the ages of faith. This will be to me some relief; it will help me bear the pain of my exile far from Him who has wounded my heart. But what do I say? Is *He* really so very far, *whom my soul loveth?* No; only I am blind, and although I have not as yet the joy of seeing His blessed countenance, I am conscious of His dear presence near me and I feel His fond embrace.

His left hand is under my head.

She means that Our Lord most tenderly intervenes, lest she should hurt herself against the hard surface of the things of this world. The

left hand of our heavenly Bridegroom in this symbolical discourse, is His sacred Humanity.

And his right hand shall embrace me.

The right hand or rather the right arm of Our Lord with which He embraces the soul of good will, means His Divinity. Yes, the glory of His divine nature envelopes, embraces and presses upon His loving heart, all those who allow Him to have His way with them. Shall we be surprised then, if the bride should fall in a sweet repose in the shelter of His arms and upon His bosom, as did St. John during the Last Supper? How different is such a trance from the heavy stertorous lethargy of a sinner, surfeited with the pleasures of the world! And yet, this same sinner could also have been, if he had but consented thereto, a loving and greatly loved soul; he too could have tasted the sweet repose and the ecstatic joy of divine contemplation.

A man who is asleep does not take any notice of what is going on around him, nor does he seek for any information about it. This is the case also for the Christian, whether he be asleep with the sleep of charity or with that of sin. The deep slumber, the kind of lethargy of the sinner, during which he may pass suddenly to the sleep of death and of death eternal, excites a feeling of pity in the bosom of the true servants of God; they try in every way to wake up the imprudent man. Alas! too often it is all in vain. On the other hand, worldlings and tepid Christians try also to awaken the fervent soul out of the sleep of divine contemplation,

because they do not understand it. The spiritual director himself and the Superior in religion, unless they also be adepts of mental prayer and experienced in the secrets of mystical life, will be found as anxious as any one else to draw that soul out of her state of supernatural repose, and violently to pull her back, against her own will, to the threshold of the spiritual life. On seeing which, the Bridegroom takes her defence. He exclaims:

I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the harts of the fields, that you stir not up, nor make the beloved awake, till she please.

Daughters of Jerusalem.

Already we have noticed that there are two distinct cities of Jerusalem, figured in Holy Writ under the symbolism of the capital city of the People of God in the Old Testament: there is first the heavenly Jerusalem, where dwells the true People of God, which is made up of the blessed angels and the saints; then, the earthly Jerusalem of the Militant Church, at present made up of a medley of saints and sinners. In this verse Our Lord speaks to the daughters of this earthly Jerusalem, that is to say to Christians, who are yet in their earthly pilgrim state here below, and among whom the bride is living.

So eagerly does He wish to save her from their importunate, ill-advised interference, that He uses the most emphatic form of entreaty: *I adjure you.* As an adjuration is always made in the name of something sacred, capable of com-

manding attention and winning respect, we are to understand by the roes and the harts of the fields—"*per capreas cervosque camporum*" æternitatis—the blessed angels and the dear saints in glory, whom the little bride is endeavouring to emulate. Jesus does this honour to His beloved elect in paradise, to swear by them, to adjure by them. In their name does He entreat and dissuade those on earth, who would inconsiderately draw the fervent soul from divine contemplation.

"Allow her," He says, "to lay her head on My bosom, as did John the Beloved, during the Last Supper; or quietly to sit at My feet, as did Mary Magdalen in the house of Lazarus, and enjoy our secret intercourse and mutual outpourings of love."

Thus did Our Lord sharply rebuke the Pharisee who, at table with Him, would have liked nothing better than to see Him repel with contempt the sinful woman who was actually recovering both purity of soul and peace of mind in the kiss of His feet. He scolded also Martha, though a friend of His, when she would have torn away her sister Mary from the Saviour's converse, in order to make her share in the bustle of preparing for Him a sumptuous repast. Even a third time did Jesus intervene in behalf of happy Magdalen, when Judas the miser accused her of undue prodigality, because she had poured out a perfume of great price on the head of the divine Master. In the same way, some Christians who are low-minded and heavy of heart would fain awaken the fervent soul from her ecstatic sleep, and force upon her the vulgar

cares of an almost exclusively material nature, as though the very highest of realities of a spiritual life were mere illusions.

The voice of the Beloved.

Even in her sleep the fervent soul hears His voice. She hears it, first of all, speaking to her through the divinely inspired books of the Old and the New Testaments; and more particularly through the Holy Gospels, the Apocalypse and the Canticle of Canticles. Then through the liturgical cycle of the feasts, entwined with the lowly splendours of the pageant of the seasons all the year round. Then again through the official authoritative teaching of Holy Church in the person of Pope, Bishops and priests, to whom Our Lord has said: *Whosoever heareth you, heareth me.* (Luke x, 16.) Finally through the legitimate commands of parents, masters, State or Church officials, religious Superiors; through the sound of the bell calling to the Divine Office or to some regular exercise; through the providential course of events, whether they bring her joy, or on the contrary sorrow.

But where the mystic bride hears more particularly the voice of her Beloved, is in her visits to the Blessed Sacrament. From the Sacred Host shut up in our tabernacles, there goes out a powerful cry, a loud clamour of love, which is only perceived with the heart, not with the ears of sense. Above all, during holy Mass, at the moment of consecration, the soul hears the voice of her Beloved at the same time as the vibrations of the bell, sounded by the little altar-

boy. That is the moment when Jesus, taking full possession of the person of His priest, uses his lips as His own instruments and makes them utter in His own name and with His own divine omnipotence, these amazing words: *This is my body . . . This is my blood . . . Eat . . . Drink.* (Matt. xxvi, 26-27.) Then it is that the bride can well cry out: *The voice of my beloved!* She is right. Could anyone else utter such omnipotent words of love?

Finally the bride hears His sweet voice in the depth of her own heart. He is pleased to keep tryst with her, in that intimate sanctuary, away from the profane gaze of creatures. There He speaks to her " without sound of words " as the author of *The Following of Christ* so well describes in his 1st Book, ch. iii and in his 3rd Book chapter ii.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Bridegroom Looking Through the Lattices

(Verses 8-15 of Ch. ii of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—What the mountains and hills are which Jesus passes over in order to come to us. Of the wall behind which He stands and the windows and lattices through which He is looking at us. What He says.

BEHOLD he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills.

We know by these words that the bride heard from afar, during her sleep, the voice of her Beloved; so great is the strength of her feelings towards Him. Now she is wide awake; she looks to the far horizon, hemmed in by mountain ranges and hills; she descries Him bounding and leaping over all obstacles to come to her, with the alertness of the roe-buck.

In order to come to me, as He does in Holy Communion, my heavenly Spouse, the Divine Word, has had to overcome formidable barriers which stood in His way, as so many mountain-ranges and hills. He did it with the greatest ease.

The mountain ranges represent, on the one hand, the pure nothingness that we are of our-

selves, then our present condition of a fallen race, finally the enormous and forbidding accumulation of our own personal sins.

In order to come to us as He does in Holy Eucharist, Our Lord had moreover to overcome other less formidable obstacles, though very real ones, which stood in His way as so many hills; I mean the natural laws which govern spirit and matter, substance and accident, time and space. Hence this exclamation of the bride.

My beloved is like a roe or a young hart.

Graceful images which aptly represent the ease and haste with which, in the eagerness of His love, the Word of God overcame every obstacle, one after the other.

Behold He standeth behind our wall.

The wall means our common human nature, which the divine Word took in the chaste bosom of the Blessed Virgin Mary and united hypostatically to Himself. Behind the man Christ, *Homo Christus Jesus,* as says St. Paul, and forming with Him one and the same person, is to be found the true Son of God, consubstantial, coeternal with the Father. Now what are those windows and lattices through which He looks at us as one who is separated from us, though very near?

Looking through the windows.

This means that since His Incarnation and human birth, Our Lord makes use of His senses even as we do. Our eyes, our ears and the other senses are as so many windows through

which our soul looks, in order to get into touch with the exterior world, and know what it is like, and in order to carry on the life of relation with our fellow-men. With His human eyes, so full of the sweetest compassion for us His brethren, with those eyes which were so often moistened with tears as we see in the Gospel, it is the Divine Word, the Bridegroom, who is looking at us. With the lips of His Sacred Humanity it is the Word of God who speaks to men in the language that is familiar to them.

Looking through the lattices.

These lattices are, to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, the sacred species, that is to say the material appearances of bread and wine. Behind these species stands the heavenly Bridegroom, in His bodily presence as the Word made flesh, the same who has been immolated on the Cross. Through these lattices, behind which He is held captive, He casts upon us glances of intense desire and love. He is asking Himself: "Will they come to visit Me? Will they have some good words from the heart to address to Me, who so ardently love them? Are they going to unite themselves to My sacrifice, by assisting with devotion at the celebration of Mass? Are they going to bestow upon Me the kiss of their fervent communion?"

Behold, my beloved speaketh to me.

Jesus speaks to each of us, individually, personally, privately, in the secret of our heart. But all do not listen, or their unmortified passions raise such a din, that His meek voice cannot

possibly be heard of them. Only a soul that is recollected within herself and very attentive, can perceive the faint sound of His voice. But what is it He says? Oh! such words as fill the soul with an inexpressible joy. He tells her:

Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come.

Oh, the lovely behest and command. How it shows the eagerness of Our Lord to enjoy the endearments of His little bride! and what enthusiastic response it elicits on her part!

Arise, come—come to Me in Holy Communion! After this command of His loving heart, shall we at last understand that whenever it is in our power to receive Him, but we fail to do so under some flimsy excuse, not only do we deprive ourselves of an inestimable benefit, but we moreover deprive Him of something He dearly loves and ardently wishes for. What folly is this!

But, my Lord, how can you possibly bestow such tender appellations and praises upon so vile and wretched a being as I know myself to be? Does, perchance, love make you also blind as it does poor human lovers? Ah! well, no indeed, it is not that. It is perfectly true that a soul in a state of grace, even though she be still full of the imperfections of a beginner, is already beautiful in the eyes of God and deserving of His most tender love. In those that are born again (through Baptism) there is nothing displeasing to God. (*Council of Trent.*)

For, winter is now past, the rain is over and gone.

By the word *winter* we must especially understand the moral consequences of original sin; and by *the rain,* the consequences of tepidity, that is to say the manifold, more or less grievous offences, which fall upon a soul like the showers of rain or hail-storms and cause it considerable damages.

Oh, my dear reader, I hope such is the case with you; and that winter is now past and the rain is now over and gone, that is to say that you are once for all done with tepidity and above all with mortal sin. If this were not so, what a shame! what a misfortune! What! you would have dared to take up this book, which is for the pure only; you would have been reading it with a profane curiosity, very likely with the secret, though unavowed, hope of finding therein something with which to gratify the pruriency of your thoughts, some excuse for indulging in lascivious imaginations. In that case let me say it again: What a shame! how horrible! how abominable! Make haste to renounce sin for good and for ever, or to put away this book which is not written for you and which is your emphatic condemnation! Just as whosoever eats and drinks unworthily the Holy Eucharist, eats and drinks his own condemnation and turns into a violent poison the very thing which, in the mind of Our Lord, was to be to the soul the food of eternal life; just in the same manner, within due proportion, whosoever dares to drink at the cup of the Canticle of Canticles with impure lips and a putrid heart, offends God

grievously and does to his own self an inexpressible injury.

The flowers have appeared in our land.

The flowers of holy desires and courageous resolutions.

The time of pruning is come.

Of this pruning does Our Lord speak in the Gospel, when He says: *I am the vine . . . you the branches. . . . My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me which beareth not fruit, he will take away; and every one that beareth fruit he will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit.* (John xv.)

As we advance in the Canticle of Canticles we shall see more and more how the Holy Ghost joins together the freshness, poetry, beauty and sublimity of nature, with the mutual praise of the Bridegroom and the bride; precisely because nature has been created for the sake of man, above all for *the man Christ Jesus* and for His beloved ones.

The voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

The turtle-dove is the emblem of simplicity and love. All its cooings are for its mate. It is a most sweet sound of love. Happy the human dove whose every sigh is for Jesus alone! With what delight does Our Lord listen to the cooing of His dear little dove! No danger that He will ever find monotonous or tiresome this voice of love, which sounds above the din of the forest of earthly things.

Our land.

We must not let pass unnoticed this little

word, twice repeated in the same verse, and which we shall meet again and again. *Our land* means a certain region held in common by both the Bridegroom and the bride. What can this be but the body and soul of the mystic? They surely belong to the mystic, since they are his very own body and soul; and they also belong to Jesus, since the mystic gives them up to Him as a free gift and will never claim them back again. It is their demesne which they hold and enjoy in common; they are joint owners.

But what a joy to hear my beloved Master speak of poor me in this strain: *Our land!* Well said, my Lord! I am yours, I belong to you entirely, I am one of your goods and chattels. And on the other hand you are Mine, you are My garden of delights. Thus to hold all things in common, is not this, as we have already seen, the law of love and the condition of our divine marriage?

The fig tree has put forth her green figs.

That is to say, fervent love has now produced its first fruits; a multitude of good works show themselves on all sides in the daily life of our mystic.

The vines in flower yield their sweet smell.

The vines are the four cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude. They yield their sweet smell as soon as the fig tree of charity begins to put forth her green figs.

My dove—in the clifts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall.

Often has this passage been explained as signifying the wounds in the hands and feet of Our dear Lord, and the deep hollow place of His sacred side, dug out by the lance of the soldier, where the mystical dove likes to take cover. This is certainly a pious interpretation from which, at certain moments, the fervent Christian is able to derive much comfort. However, from the point of view of the literal and dogmatic interpretation of this book of the Canticle of Canticles, we must acknowledge that it is only an accommodative meaning and not a strictly mystical one, for this last must of necessity rest upon the logical sequence of ideas in the text. Now, if we take into consideration the fact that, in this passage, it is the Bridegroom who addresses these words to His bride, and that He is actually separated from her by a wall and lattices, it is more to the point to interpret it as follows:

The rock is the Church, the Holy Catholic Church Militant on earth, which has been founded by Our Lord Himself upon the firm authority of St. Peter and his successors. Genuine mystical life is only found in the clift of that rock, that is to say within the precincts of the Catholic Church. As for the hollow places in the wall, they mean the lowly employments and hidden life, where a mystical soul finds her delights, the more so that they are a help to divine contemplation. The humbler your place and office in your community, the better for you, if you only know how to appreciate it. "Love to be unnoticed and held for naught," says the author of *The Following of Christ.*

Show me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears.

The bride complies with these tenderly proffered requests of Our Lord, and causes Him joy by her spirit of internal recollection and by mental prayer. The more she withdraws herself from intercourse with the creatures, the more also does she show her face to the Beloved, and the more does her voice become melodious and sonorous in His ears.

For thy voice is sweet.

The voice of adoration, in the divine praise of the psalmody by day and night, and in the outpourings of love from a burning heart. Sweet to Jesus is such a sound. Sweet also to men is the voice of the bride, because she is meek and humble after the pattern of her Beloved, full of gentleness to all men of any rank or profession, but above all, to those who are in trouble. Not only does she speak kind words, but she does it sweetly. By an effort of charity, she, of set purpose, modulates the very sound of her voice in accordance with her feelings of sympathy and compassion, so that it does one good merely to hear it. In the intercourse of our daily life, a gentle voice charms everyone and softens and wins even the most rebellious hearts.

And thy face is comely.

The face is the mirror of the soul. When all is well ordered inside, there shows itself on the face a beautiful expression of peace which cannot deceive. See the candid expression of the face in little children. But here it is a question

of the face of the soul, not of the body. As for us, we have no direct perception of the natural comeliness of the human soul, made to the image and likeness of God; still less can we form any idea of its supernatural beauty, when, through the efficacy of the Sacraments, it is raised to the dignity of the state of grace. God alone can appreciate to the full the comeliness of such a soul; as for ourselves let us at least make an act of faith in this regard, upon the testimony of the Heavenly Bridegroom. " O Christian," exclaims one of the Fathers of the Church, " become conscious of thine own dignity."

Within a soul in the state of grace, Our Lord descries not only her virtues and the merits of her good works, but moreover the marks left by the Sacraments. There are, first of all, the indelible characters of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders; then the marks left at each fresh reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. They are as so many strokes of the chisel or of the brush of the Divine Artist, incessantly adding new charms on the face of a well disposed soul.

Let us once for all understand that, by the very fact of her Baptism, the Christian soul has become the bride of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Son of God has conceived towards her the tender affection of a husband. She may have had the misfortune of straying away from Him by sin; she has not ceased to be His. She may have been unfaithful, an adulteress (Oh great pity!) she has not ceased to be His wedded wife; and He, on His part, has not ceased for a single moment from ardently longing after her return

to Him, and calling after her, and promising her that all would be forgiven and forgotten. No sooner has she returned to Him than He gives her tenderly the kiss of peace.

Winter is now past.

Here is a delightful word of St. Francis de Sales, which may help us to comprehend the ways of God in regard to beginners. "There are," he says, "souls who, having recently been delivered from the thraldom of sin and having quite made up their mind to apply themselves to the love of God, are nevertheless still novices, apprentices, without much firmness or strength; so that they have a liking for divine sweetness, but they mix it up with so many other different affections, that their love of God must be considered as being as yet in its infancy. They love Our Lord, and together with Him a large number of things superfluous, vain and dangerous. Just as a phœnix, recently born again out of its own ashes, is only covered as yet but with small weak feathers and soft down, by the help of which it cannot be said to fly but only to skip; in much the same way these tender young souls, freshly born again out of the ashes of their penance, are as yet unable to raise themselves aloft and wing their flight in the high regions of divine love, being prevented from so doing by the multitude of their evil inclinations, and vicious habits which past sins have left behind them. They are nevertheless living birds, animated and feathered by divine love of the genuine kind; otherwise they would never have abandoned sin; but their love of God is still

weakly and inexperienced; and as it is surrounded with a quantity of other loves, it cannot produce as much fruit as it would if it were in total and exclusive possession of the heart." (*Love of God.* Book X, Ch. iv.)

CHAPTER XXIV

The Little Foxes that Destroy the Vine.

(Verse 15 of Ch. ii of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—Those little foxes are our daily imperfections against which a relentless war has to be waged. Why we must be careful not to outrun our present grace.

CATCH us the little foxes that destroy the vines.

Those little foxes are our defects and customary imperfections. If they already do so much havoc whilst yet small, what will it not be if we allow them to grow? They destroy the vineyard of our soul, diminishing its sightliness and value and production; endangering the vintage of eternal merits.

In the soul which is being led forward by the Spirit of God to a perfect union with His divine Goodness, there remain but small defects and imperfections; it is impossible for anyone whilst here below to be quite free from such. Nevertheless, be these ever so small, they still do a great deal of damage in the soul. Therefore one must pursue them, trap them, exterminate them without any mercy. They are not the same in every man, nor are they the same in the same man at diverse periods of his life. They change and metamorphose themselves, according to the

age, environments, temper, occupations and employments of the subject.

The defects in which devout persons may fall in the beginning of the spiritual life are analysed with great subtlety by St. John of the Cross in *The Dark Night of the Soul,* Book I, Chapters iii to vii. Let it suffice here to put our readers on their guard against spiritual pride, spiritual jealousy, secret self-seeking even in the things of God, intemperance of the tongue, the eyes, the other senses, and in human friendships.

These defects are described as small foxes, because, although she cannot prevent them from being born, a faithful soul will never allow them to grow to any size. The danger is only that whilst they are so small, they may be allowed to pass unobserved. Catch hold of them and crush them against the stone by the contemplation of Jesus crucified.

Our vineyard hath flourished.

It is Jesus who speaks thus, and it is of His little bride that He speaks thus. He and she are now one and the same vine, so closely and vitally are they united. *I am the vine, you the branches,* He tells His apostles at the Last Supper. *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.* (John xv, 4-5.) But oh! how pleasing it must be to the little bride, to hear herself spoken of by the Beloved as *our vineyard;* the vineyard which belongs to us both! A pure and fervent soul by right belongs to God, because it is He that made her what she is; and yet she belongs also to herself in strict justice, since God gave her into the hands of her own

counsel, freely to dispose of herself as she lists. This vineyard is the vineyard of Jesus, since He planted it and infused into it His own divine life, the sap of grace; and it is the bride's vineyard, since it is the bride herself and since she puts no obstacle in the way of grace and co-operates with all her might with its operations in her. Hence the fruits of this vineyard when they ripen will be the joint property of the two.

Please, note that it is only question of one who is a beginner; that is why Jesus does not as yet speak of the fruits, but only of their promise in the flowers. The loving soul who is as yet but a beginner, produces first the flowers of holy desires and generous resolutions; the fruits will come in due time. One must not try to steal a march upon God by reaching out beyond one's actual gifts of grace and setting at naught the laws which regulate the ordinary process of supernatural life. Let us be humble, patient, and let us go forward one step at a time. We shall be doing very well indeed, if we only never stop on the road to perfection; thus shall we please God. Do not little children please their parents and everybody, even though they are not as yet capable of doing any work? That will come in due time.

When Jesus says: *Our vineyard hath flourished*, and speaks of the little foxes, it is as though He said, "O soul of goodwill, I am fully aware that there are in thee the happy beginnings of every virtue—but for that very reason I want thee to be very much on thy guard against thy smallest enemies, for it is only in appearance that they are contemptible."

CHAPTER XXV

Reply of the Bride to Jesus

(Verses 16 and 17 of Ch. ii of the Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—The holy exercise of the presence of God superseded by that of enjoying God. How this exercise is disengaged from all that is sensuous. Conclusion of this First Part.

ON hearing the tender appeal of her Beloved, who said to her: *Show me thy face: let thy voice sound in my ears,* the bride seems at first to fall into a sweet reverie of self-communing. Speaking to herself, she says: *My beloved to me and I to him, who feedeth among the lilies.* Then, all at once, she turns towards Him and exclaims with deep emotion: *Return, O my beloved. Till the day break and the shadows retire, be like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.*

My beloved to me and I to Him.

These words of the bride are verified in her divine contemplation, in her persevering union with Him even in the midst of the bustle of her active life, but more especially at the happy moments of Holy Communion.

For the true mystic, the holy exercise of the presence of God is soon superseded by another

much more precious exercise, namely that of enjoying God. The august reality of the natural presence of God everywhere almost sinks into insignificance in the eyes of the fervent Christian, in comparison to this other reality of the supernatural presence of God in his heart, the presence by way of love.

The Archangel Gabriel, in the opening sentence of his message to the Blessed Virgin Mary, says with unmistakable emphasis: *The Lord is with thee*, thereby proclaiming that God was already present with the presence of love in Mary, and that, on her part, this admirable Virgin was actively holding herself united to His infinite Goodness. Must it not be so even with us, though of course in a lesser degree? *Behold*, says Our Lord in the Apocalypse, *I stand at the gate and knock. If any man shall hear my voice and open to me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me.* (Apoc. iii, 20.) And in St. John's Gospel: *If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.* (John xiv, 23.)

My beloved to me and I to him.

To me; yes, even to me, does Jesus give and surrender His sweet divine self. He makes Himself my guest, my solitary friend, the dweller in my heart.

And I to Him.

On my part, I give and dedicate and surrender my own self wholly to Him. I deliver into

His blessed hands my entire being, body and soul; I transfer to Him all my rights; freely and willingly do I abandon to Him the only thing that is truly mine, namely, my poor self. Therefore, O creatures, ye come too late: do not beg for my affections; do not try to wrest my heart from Jesus, who alone is worthy to have it in His possession. Do not proffer to me your deceitful charms and empty consolations. I have something better. I have my Jesus, who loves and wants to be loved with a chaste affection, *who feedeth among the lilies.*

See how chaste, pure, modest, *verecundus* is our loving Lord in His Blessed Sacrament. He does not so much as show to us His blessed, virginal countenance. We can neither see His face nor feel Him with our hands, nor embrace Him and kiss Him and strain Him to our breast. Although He be therein present in His two natures of God and man, what we descry with our bodily eyes is not His dear self but only the species of bread and wine; under which commonplace appearances He does not solicit either the caress of the hand nor that of the lips. Moreover a strict ceremonial stands in the way of any familiar dealing with Him.

Therefore I repeat, how very holy and virginal and above the senses and heavenly is our intercourse of love with Jesus in Holy Communion. It is an intercourse with Him who *feedeth among the lilies.* Nevertheless, when all has been said, it remains that my dear Lord give Himself wholly to me and take hold of my whole being. And I, on my part, though such an unspeakable wretch, I want to give up

into His hands all that I am, without restriction or division and without any return, and that is why I bid an eternal adieu to all things created.

Therefore, O my brothers and sisters, wayfarers with me upon this land of our pilgrimage, I am quite resolved neither to love you nor allow you to love me after a purely natural manner. I do not want anyone to give himself to me, nor do I want anyone to filch any part of my affections. Of course I shall never cease tenderly to love you in the Lord, for did He not say: *This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you?* (John xv, 12); but then it is not you, for what there is of yourselves, I am loving, but Him in you; that is to say, all that there is of Him in you, together with all the divine possibilities of which He deposited the germs in you. I will joyfully, and with humble gratitude, accept such kind serviecs and tokens of good will as you may be pleased to bestow upon me; and I for my part, will greatly honour you and serve you with all my heart, for His dear love. Thus far will I go, but not a step farther.

The mystic is never less alone than when alone, for then he is all to his Beloved and his Beloved is wholly to him. The presence and above all the conversation of other men only serve to hinder the embraces and heart-to-heart effusions of these two lovers.

Here, then, O my Lord Jesus, my dear heavenly Spouse, here am I; body and soul, the work of Thy blessed hands, Thine by every right: although love has thrown in the shade and superseded all the other rights save that

which arises from our divine marriage. All I ask for, henceforth, is only this: first Thine own glory; and secondly that Thou shouldst find Thy delights in me. Yes, Thy glory above all things and before all things, in such a way that without any regard to my being in existence, Thou, my Lord, Thou alone be praised, loved and exalted by every creature, world without end. And then, since as a matter of fact I do exist, since Thou hast made me for Thyself, I ardently desire that Thou shouldst now render me worthy of Thyself, so that it be possible for Thee to take Thy delights in me.

Ah! my Lord, Thou art but very ill served in me and by me. Thou hast the worst of the bargain; this is just what the world calls a bad business. Thou to me, and in exchange the vile wretch that I am, to Thee! This is an incredible adventure! *My beloved to me and I to Him, who feedeth among the lilies.*

It is upon such sentiments of humility, gratitude and burning love that the end of the first stage of the spiritual life is reached. The bride ceases to be a child: she feels her wings. Opening eyes of wonderment upon the immense azure fields and free spaces of divine love, she is all a-tremble with emotion and ready to take her flight.

PART II

The Young Bride Growing into the Fulness of her Charms

CHAPTER XXVI

Characteristics of the Second Stage of the Spiritual Life

SUMMARY.—The soul now seeks her Beloved not for His gifts but for Himself. How rich and dramatic a life she is living. What we mean by ecstatic love.

IN the first two chapters of the Canticle of Canticles which we have just paraphrased, the bride was in her spiritual childhood: quite small, graceful, innocent, fond of receiving endearments and sweets; at the same time full of the imperfections of that age, incapable of performing heavy work or sustaining any grievous trial. That soul was thinking principally of herself: not any longer, as of yore, in a way displeasing to God, but in a saintly way, seeing herself by the light of Our Lord, by the light of His Holy Gospel and of His Holy Eucharist. She was enamoured with the charms of her Heavenly Bridegroom, much more for the sweet comforts they afforded her, than for the sake of Him. Yet, Our Lord did not, for all that, find fault with her, just as good parents do not find fault with their little darlings for being fond of caresses, smiles and all sorts of sweetmeats.

What characterises the pages of the Canticle

we are now going to paraphrase and interpret, is the anxious search after the Beloved, in the midst of the most trying vexations. It comprises three chapters of the sacred text (iii-v) and corresponds to the phase of the spiritual life known as the Illuminative Way.

In it the soul is more vividly enlightened and touched with a more efficacious grace; she goes beyond the limits of spiritual infancy and leaves them far behind. Henceforth she anxiously seeks after her Beloved, not for His gifts but for Him; her only pain being to discover her manifold miseries. She attributes to her unworthiness the fact that Jesus often withdraws from her the sight of His loveliness or the feeling of His presence. She feels keenly that she has not yet come of age in Jesus Christ and become nubile to Him, which is the object of her most ardent wishes. She is most generous, and no trial whatever, either from outside or from within, is able to discourage her.

The three chapters of the Canticle of Canticles which form this second part of our little treatise, place this fresh aspect of the mystical life under our eyes in a most dramatic fashion. It would seem at first sight that for the ecstatic love of our Lord, to which it serves as a practical introduction, nothing else should be required except God and the soul, but indeed it is not so. The dramatic action of the Canticle develops itself in the midst of the most varied and enchanting scenery. Besides the fields, vineyards, trees, flowers, perfumes of nature or made by the skill of man; besides the hills and mountains, the roes and harts, the doves, the lambs with

their dams as in the preceding pages, we have now moreover dens of lions, mountains haunted by leopards, choirs of angels and troops of young maidens; then the city with its guards by day and night and all sorts of incidents which happen. Why all this? It is in order to give us to understand that the bride, if she wants to live her life of divine love, has need, not only of Jesus, her Lord and Bridegroom, but also of His sweet Mother, the blessed Virgin Mary, of the blessed angels, of the dear saints of paradise, of the holy souls in Purgatory, and finally of the whole Militant Church with her hierarchy, her holy sacrifice of the Mass and the treasure of the word of God and the seven sacraments, which have been entrusted to her keeping and ministration. By God's ordinance, the loving soul, in her present condition, has need of the whole creation, animate and inanimate, and of all these persons and of all these things, to help her to live in the midst of the flames of divine love, to give her some relief from the intensity of her feelings, so that she may take breath; otherwise she would simply be crushed to death under the weight of the love of God and of the mysteries of Jesus, contemplated in too exclusive, sustained and protracted a manner.

Besides, although the mystical life essentially consists in the intercourse of the loving soul with the loving God in the secret of her heart, nevertheless it cannot be confined within such a narrow place: it must needs break out into all sorts of saintly activities, and, as we shall see, into downright apostolate.

Thus understood, mystical life is assuredly the

richest, the fullest, the most opulent, the most marvellously vast and spacious and comprehensive, which a man could possibly live; and yet, at the same time, it is a wonderfully simplified life, since it refers and subdues everything to the sole object of his ardent love, the Lord Christ.

When I speak of the ecstatic love of Jesus, I do not mean thereby such a love as would impel one to have or wish to have ecstasies, private revelations or other miraculous things: but such a love as will make one go out (*ex stare*) of himself, wholly to pass into Jesus and dwell in Him. Such a love does not leave the beaten paths of Christian piety, but it does, in these lowly paths, demean itself with most extraordinary purity of intention and fervour of love.

The chapters of this second part are conspicuously fewer in number and more lengthy than in the first, for the reason that herein we meet with incidents which it would not do to curtail or cut into pieces, as such a process would infallibly detract from their beauty and high significance.

CHAPTER XXVII

(Chapters iii to v of the Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—What happened just before the bridal procession. How Jesus celebrates the charms of His wedded bride. Her mysterious tribulations. She describes her Beloved.

THE BRIDE, speaking no doubt to some of her companions, relates to them the first adventure she met with in her new life. She says:

In my bed, by night, I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him and found him not. Then I said: I will rise and will go about the city. In the streets and the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth.

I sought him and found him not. The watchmen who kept the city found me. I asked them: *Have you seen him whom my soul loveth?*

When I had a little passed by them, I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him and I will not let him go. I will bring him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that bore me.

Having said this, the bride falls into the sleep of divine contemplation, so that her Beloved, speaking to her companions, repeats a second time this entreaty, which we have already heard in chapter ii of the Canticle.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the harts of the fields, that you stir not up, nor awake my beloved, till she please.

Now the angels, on witnessing the rapid progress of the youthful bride in the career of the love of God, ask one another:

Who is she that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh, and frankincense, and of all the powders of the perfumer?

They wonder at the happy lot which has fallen to this puny child of earth. They remark:

Behold threescore valiant ones of the most valiant of Israel, surround the bed of Solomon, all holding swords and most expert in war: every man's sword on his thigh, because of fears in the night.

They add: *King Solomon hath made him a litter of the wood of Libanus: the pillars thereof he made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple, the midst he covered with charity for the daughters of Jerusalem.*

Then addressing themselves to the maiden friends of the bride the angels conclude:

Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon in the diadem, wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousal and in the day of the joy of his heart.

The heavenly BRIDEGROOM now lavishes magnificent praises on the ever growing charms of His youthful bride. He exclaims:

How beautiful art thou, my love, how beautiful art thou!

Thy eyes are dove's eyes, besides what is hid within. Thy hair is as flocks of goats which come up from mount Galaad. Thy teeth as flocks of sheep, that are shorn, which come up from the washing, all with twins, and there is none barren among them: thy lips are as a scarlet lace, and thy speech is sweet. Thy cheeks are as a piece of pomegranate, besides that which lieth hid within. Thy neck, as the Tower of David, which is build with bulwarks. A thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armour of valiant men.

Reddening with the blushes of sincerest humility on hearing her heavenly Bridegroom praise her so highly, the fervent soul interrupts Him with these words of self-abasement.

Till the day break and the shadows retire, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.

But the heavenly Bridegroom begins again with renewed feelings of tenderness:

Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee.

Come from Libanus, my spouse,
Come from Libanus:
From the top of Amana,
From the top of Sanir and Hermon,
From the dens of the lions,
From the mountains of the leopards,
Come: thou shalt be crowned.

Thou hast wounded my heart,
My sister and spouse,
Thou hast wounded my heart
With one glance of thy eyes,
With one hair of thy neck.

Thy lips, my spouse, are as a dropping honeycomb,
Honey and milk are under thy tongue;
The smell of thy garments is as that of frankincense.
My sister and spouse is a garden enclosed.
A fountain sealed up:
The fountain of gardens,
The well of living waters,
Which run impetuously from Libanus.

Thy plants are a paradise of pomegranates with the fruits of the orchard: cyprus with spikenard, and saffron; sweet cane and cinnamon, with all the trees of Libanus; myrrh and aloes with all the chief perfumes.

Arise, O north wind, and come:
O south wind, blow through my garden:
Let the aromatical spices thereof flow.

Then there follows a lively little dialogue between the enamoured soul and the heavenly Bridegroom.

THE BRIDE: *Let my beloved come into his garden and eat the fruits of his apple-trees.*

JESUS: *I am come into my garden. O my sister and spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my aromatical spices; I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk.* And now, turning to the other two Persons of the Most Holy Trinity He adds: *Eat*, in your turn, *O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.*

THE BRIDE: *I sleep and my heart watcheth. The voice of my beloved knocking!*

JESUS: *Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is full of dew, and my locks of the drops of the nights.*

THE BRIDE: *I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?*

Hereupon there follows the narrative of the second adventure of the young bride, given by herself in a most feeling manner. Thus:

My beloved put his hand through the key-hole and my bowels were moved at his touch. I arose up to open to my beloved. My hands dropped with myrrh and my fingers were full of the choicest myrrh, which the hand of Jesus had spread over the key-hole. *I opened the bolt of my door to my beloved, but he had turned aside and was gone. My soul melted when he spoke. I sought him and found him not, I called and he did not answer me. The keepers that go about the city found me: they struck me and wounded me. The keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.*

The bride concludes her narrative with this entreaty which she addresses to the blessed angels and saints of paradise: *I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I languish with love.*

Then they ask her with tender compassion:

What manner of one is thy beloved of the beloved, O thou most beautiful among women; what manner of one is thy beloved of the beloved, that thou hast so adjured us?

THE BRIDE: *My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands. His head is as the finest gold, his locks as branches of palm*

trees, black as a raven. His eyes as doves upon brooks of water, which are washed with milk and rest beside the plentiful streams. His cheeks are as beds of aromatical spices set by the perfumers. His lips are as lilies dropping choice myrrh. His hands are turned and as of gold, full of hyacinths. His belly is of ivory, set with sapphires. His legs as pillars of marble, that are set upon bases of gold. His form as of Libanus, excellent as the cedars. His throat most sweet, and he is all lovely. Such is my beloved, and he is my friend, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.

Whereupon all the blessed angels and saints ask again in a chorus:

Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou most beautiful among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside, and we will seek him with thee?

CHAPTER XXVIII

About Holy Exercises

(Verses 1 to 5 of Ch. iii of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—Holy exercises are required in the beginning, and in the progress and to the very end of the spiritual life. Their great variety. Magdalen at the tomb of Jesus, and the soul seeking after her beloved. What happens then.

On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loveth; I sought him and found him not.

Let us take these words first in their natural, literal meaning.

Even on her bed of rest, and during night, when people are wont to sleep, the loving soul applies herself to the search after God, to divine contemplation. It is even at such moments that she experiences the greatest spiritual delights, in the hush of creatures around her and the quietude of her own faculties. Our Lord spent whole nights in prayer after long days of apostolic labour. *Erat pernoctans in oratione Dei.* (Luke vi, 12.) David practised the exercise of holy compunction on his couch of rest. He says (in Ps. vi, 7) *Every night I will wash my bed, I will water my couch with my tears;* and he exhorts

us to do the same: The wicked *things you say in your hearts, during the day time, be sorry for upon your beds.* (Ps. iv, 5.)

Then, we may consider the bride's bed to mean her condition in the present life, as long as it pleases God to keep her in it. On this bed she sweetly abandons herself to the sleep of implicit trust in God: an austere and narrow bed it is, on which nevertheless one sleeps soundly, looking forward to the awakening of the life to come, which will soon and so happily surprise us in the middle of the night, *media nocte*, as Our Lord tells us in the parable of the Virgins. On that bed one yearns to enjoy already the delights of intimate union with the Beloved: one seeks after Him, but perchance one finds Him not.

Those nights here spoken of by the bride are the three kinds of obscure nights which St. John of the Cross has so carefully described in the ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL: the night of the senses, the night of the spirit, and finally the Great Dark Cloud of the Divine Essence, in regard to which the eyes of the soul are as those of an owl in regard to the sun in the firmament. Through these nights the loving soul seeks after her Beloved and finds Him not: then she cries out:

I will rise and will go about the city, in the streets and the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth.

Evidently the loving soul has no sympathy for the errors of the Quietists, who would fain reduce the spiritual man to have no personal initia-

tive. He should, they say, annihilate all his powers and hold himself absolutely passive in regard to good or evil, even as a dead body. The bride of the Canticle is well aware that spiritual exercises are necessary in order to enter into the interior life, that they are necessary if one is to progress in it, that they are necessary for anyone who wishes to persevere in it unto the end and attain the goal of perfection. At no stage of the career of sanctity may the soul stand absolutely passive, or imagine that she could do so with impunity. Hence it is that such a multitude of books of spiritual exercises have been inspired by the grace of God and written by so many holy and learned personages, such as, for instance: the INSINUATIONES DIVINÆ PIETATIS of St. Gertrude, the SPIRITUAL EXERCISES of Abbot Cisneros of Montserrat, the most renowned BOOK OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES of St. Ignatius Loyola, who has been lately proclaimed by the Holy See the very Patron of all who practise spiritual exercises in any shape or form; the less known and yet really wonderful books on this subject, which the famous Capuchin Father Joseph, who was surnamed "L'Eminence Grise," the confessor of Richelieu, composed for the Benedictine Nuns of Calvary. Such again as the volumes of THE LITURGICAL YEAR of Dom Guéranger.

Yet the liturgical year itself of Holy Church, what is it from end to end, but a succession of varied exercises of piety in regard to each mystery of our Redemption, as they follow each other in the cycle of the year? Then the admirable variety of private devotions produced from time

to time under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, *who breatheth where He wills* (John iii, 8), and when He wills, and nowadays preached and practised all at the same time with the sanction of Holy Church: what are they but so many spiritual exercises calculated to keep alive the piety of all souls of good will?

It is the fashion with a certain class of half-hearted Christians to speak lightly of this multitude of devotions. Yet they have their reason. It is a sign of fervour for a soul to have had at a certain period of her career a large number of private devotions. This, of course, does not last. As she progresses in her spiritual life, she will shed them one by one and the tendency will be for her to simplify more and more her interior life: meanwhile these private devotions help her to keep warm and to strike, out of the dull stone of her heart, sparks of divine love. That is why the bride of the Canticle sets out in search of her Beloved, by means of holy exercises. But, spite of all her endeavours, He does not as yet show Himself to her. This wrenches from her the painful avowal:

I sought him and I found him not.

With the purpose of putting to the test the loyalty of that soul, Our Lord hides Himself from her for a while. Thereby her love for Him is bound to break out, if it be genuine. The half-hearted Christian, weak and negligent, takes occasion of such a trial in order to slacken his pious exercises and turn to what comfort he may find in creatures; on the contrary, whosoever is fervent, will give himself no repose until he has found again Him whom his soul loves above all

things. Thus Mary and Joseph, as soon as they had noticed the disappearance of Jesus, on their return from Jerusalem. Thus again the inconsolable Mary Magdalen, on the morning of the Resurrection, when Jesus, under the figure of the gardener, asked her: *Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?* She answered Him incoherently: *Sir, if thou hast taken him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.* (John xx, 15.)

But, poor Mary Magdalen, really, really, in the intensity of thy grief, thou knowest not what thou sayest. Canst thou believe thou couldst carry all alone in thy arms, as though it were a baby, the dead body of a full grown man? But love will hear no reasoning. It goes straight ahead without so much as a glance at impossibilities. Then is Jesus satisfied. Then does He speak only one word, but oh! in what a tone of voice, so loving, so moving! At once the heart of the illustrious penitent is overwhelmed with joy; she throws herself at His blessed feet exclaiming: *Rabboni! my good Master!* and she would fain devour them with kisses.

Very much in the same way did things fall out with the bride of the Canticle. Hear what she has to relate:

The watchmen who kept the city found me: and I asked them: *Have you seen him whom my soul loveth? When I had a little passed by them, I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him and I will not let him go.*

This meeting of hers with the watchmen of the city and her asking of them: Have you

seen Him whom my soul loveth? signifies that in her distress the fervent soul manifests to her spiritual directors the painful state of dryness and helplessness she finds herself in, so that they may wisely counsel her what to do. Very often, no sooner has the fervent soul performed that act of humility than Jesus begins again to show Himself to her.

Entrancing moment this—when Jesus after having submitted His youthful bride to her first severe trial, allows her to *hold Him* and strain Him to her heart; and begins Himself to console her, tenderly wiping the tears from her eyes! Then does she give free rein to the expression of her wild, impetuous joy, holy and supernatural. Then truly, like Mary Magdalen, is she out of herself, not knowing what she says. Hear her exclaim:

I will not let him go, till I bring him into my mother's house and into the chamber of her that bore me.

Indeed it is proper that the nuptial procession, which we shall soon see marching past, should start from the house of the happy bride, that is to say from her parents' dwelling.

The loving soul speaks but of her mother, because she has no other parent, no father, here below. She has only a mother who is a virgin: I mean the most holy Virgin Mary whose house is the Church. The Catholic Church is indeed the only Church which has constantly loved Mary; loved her tenderly, honoured and glorified her: whilst the dissentient sects have vehemently protested against this worship of hyperdulia,

or highest reverence, paid to the sweet Mother of God, as well as against the simple worship of dulia, that is to say of deep reverence, which we render to the saints who are all inferior to Mary: as though such a worship either of dulia or hyperdulia could in any way detract from the worship of latria, that is to say of absolute adoration, which is due to God alone.

After so many emotions, the bride needs some rest. Jesus puts her to sleep in an ecstasy of joyful contemplation. Then we hear Him repeat to the maiden-companions of the bride the touching admonition which we have already met with a first time in chapter ii, v. 7, of the Canticle: *I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the harts of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my beloved till she please.*

CHAPTER XXIX

The Nuptial Procession

(Verses 6 to 11 of Ch. iii of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—What the angels admire in it: first the bride, then the nuptial couch, the cross, borne in great pomp, finally the Bridegroom with His retinue. The diadem of our King and of His little bride.

WHAT follows is sung or declaimed by some angelic choir. They narrate the splendours of the nuptial procession. Three objects more particularly rouse their admiration: first of all the bride herself decked in most gorgeous raiment, which enhances her personal charms, as she gracefully walks, surrounded by her maiden attendants; then the nuptial couch, that is to say the Cross, borne aloft in triumph and duly escorted; finally the heavenly Bridegroom, wearing on His head the kingly diadem and surrounded, no doubt, with a fitting guard of honour.

The angels then first ask one another:

Who is she that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh and frankincense, and of all the powders of the perfumer?

Let us here notice a fact which I have already pointed out in my previous treatises: this namely,

that when the blessed angels witness the generous and notable progress of a fervent Christian in the path of divine love, they talk of it among themselves with admiration and do not stint their praises of him.

Who is she?

That is to say: How very sweet and beautiful she is! How far has her proficiency in all virtues exceeded our expectations! and how much has it graced her with fresh charms! She has become a compound of all the virtues mixed together as a light pillar of smoke of aromatical spices. *Myrrh* is the first named, because sorrow for her past sins and the tears of compunction have been the very first manifestations of her love of Jesus; *frankincense* follows, which represents the acts of the most fervent adoration: finally the acts of all the cardinal, theological, priestly and religious virtues put together, are alluded to under the expression: *all the powders of the perfumer.*

The *perfumer* (pigmentarius) is the Holy Spirit. By the exercise of the Seven Gifts He fills the soul of good will with innumerable merits as with a sweet-scented powder. Then small wonder is it that she should exhale and spread around a sweet perfume.

But now, behold, there comes into view *the bed of Solomon;* borne in great pomp. I mean the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The narrow couch, *lectulus*, of Jesus, the true Solomon, the true *King of peace*, was first of all the bosom of the immaculate Virgin, then the poor crib of Bethlehem, finally the rugged cross, and now

it is first the ciborium in the tabernacle, then my own heart, a very narrow couch, this last; far too small indeed and unworthy of the Divine Majesty. But, O my Love, is it impossible then to enlarge its dimensions? Art not Thou the omnipotent God? Thy love was at ease and found its delights during nine months in the most pure tabernacle of the virgin flesh of Mary, Thy sweet Mother. It was also at ease in the crib of the poor stable. There it is that it chose to receive the visit of its first courtiers, the angels, and then the poor shepherds and a little later the three Wise men from the east. It still finds itself at ease within the narrow precincts of the tabernacle and the ciborium. Alas! is it only in the wretched abode of my heart that Thou wilt feel straitened? O my King, for Thy honour's sake, let us enlarge this narrow heart of mine; let us make it spacious and powerful in love. Cannot we achieve this, Thou on the one hand, by the effort of Thine infinite charity, and I on the other hand, by giving my full consent and hearty co-operation to Thy grace?

Now let us turn again our attention to the royal couch, which *threescore valiant ones of the most valiant of Israel surround.*

Threescore. This is a mystical expression to mean an indefinite number of worshippers. Century after century all the fervent souls, the world over, have vied with each other in their eagerness to press around the crib of Bethlehem, the Cross on Calvary, and the lowly Tabernacle in our Churches, just as, by command of the Most High, millions of blessed angels mounted guard in-

visibly around the sweet maiden of Nazareth, who had become the mother of God without ceasing to be a virgin; as also legions of good angels crowd around our altars during the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and around our tabernacles by day and night, and around every Christian who has just received Holy Communion; in order to pay reverence to King Jesus in his living and breathing tabernacle of flesh, on His narrow bed of state, a human heart!

Those *threescore valiant ones of the most valiant of Israel, holding swords and most expert in war,* who are they? They are the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, who with jealous care watch over the purity of faith and morals. They are also the blessed angels who are sent out to protect us.

The most valiant choirs angelical who invisibly press around our tabernacles, have given proof of their courage in the great battle which they had to fight, in the heaven of their trial, against the rebel archangel and his battalions. They now continue the same fight, only the stage where it is fought is different: it is our earth, and the things at stake are the souls of men. Here again the blessed angels would be sure to conquer, were it not that we, whose interests tremble in the balance, are sometimes perverse enough to play the traitor. Their multitude is beyond all imagining. One day Marie Eustelle had a vision of the adoring angels around the Blessed Sacrament. So prodigious was their multitude that she never would have thought it possible for such a number of created beings to exist anywhere; and yet it was only a fraction

of one of the nine choirs of angels, that of the Virtues.

Every man's sword upon his thigh, because of fears in the night.

The blessed angels employ themselves with great solicitude and joy in mounting guard around the fervent soul, who has made of her heart a throne to Jesus in the centre of all her affections. For that wayfarer is still in the night of the present life and many enemies are lurking in the surrounding darkness.

King Solomon hath made him a litter of the wood of Libanus: the pillars thereof he made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple: the midst he covered with charity for the daughters of Jerusalem.

In these mysterious accents do the angels celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation, without which that of Redemption by the cross would never have been possible, nor, consequently, that of grace and glory for the predestinate.

King Solomon here means the Divine Word who is the splendour and wisdom of God the Father. *He made for Himself a litter* when, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, He fashioned His own sacred Humanity out of an incorruptible wood, namely, the immaculate flesh of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is upon this litter, His sacred Humanity, that henceforth the Holy of Holies will be moved and carried from place to place, through the desert of the present life, even as of old He was carried upon the Ark of the Covenant, from camp to camp, in the desert, with the People of God.

The pillars made of silver are the sacred members and the various organs of the body of Our Lord. The *seat of gold* is the adorable breast of Our Saviour; the *going up of purple* is an allusion to the various sheddings of His most precious blood. Finally *the midst which He covered with charity for the daughters of Jerusalem*, designates the tender loving affections of His Sacred Heart, which cover up and at the same time manifest the immense treasures of His divine mercy towards all men of whom He became the true brother by the Incarnation.

Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon in the diadem wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the joy of his heart.

In such gorgeous, magnificent language, do the blessed angels invite all men to contemplate the joy of Our Lord when it is given Him to meet with a fervent soul. Only, if we want to enjoy such a marvellous sight, we have first to *go forth* out of the house of our self-love and of the vanities of the world. Then it shall be given us to see. Then perhaps also will it be given us to become enamoured of the loveliness of King Solomon and to unite ourselves to Him in the sweetest bonds of a spiritual marriage.

In the diadem wherewith his mother crowned him.

What diadem? Oh! simply, a crown of thorns. He is King and He is a Bridegroom: on both these accounts does it behove Him to

wear a crown. Here, then, it is: a whole bush of long, cruel, sharp-pointed thorns which pierce deeply into His sacred head and inflict on Him the most excruciating pains: a twofold crown, first of mockery and shame, because He had proclaimed Himself King; then of sorrow and unutterable suffering, in order to express the greatness of his love as Bridegroom of our souls. And it is His mother, His mother, say we, not the Virgin Mary, but the Synagogue, which so treated Him.

On becoming His bride, O my soul, thou becamest at the same time also a queen: does it not behove thee, then, also to wear a crown? What sort of a crown? Assuredly one of the same kind as that of thy Beloved. I must not wish for any other. Gold and precious stones are vile things compared with the thorns which the blood of my Saviour has imbued. Come then,

thou crown of thorns of heroic mortification and crown of thorns of humiliations, either voluntary or received in spite of myself: yes, come and encircle my brow, make my head bend down meekly, lovingly, and may at last my heavenly Bridegroom have the joy of finding me a bride of whom he will not have to be ashamed before His Heavenly Father.

In the day of his espousals and in the day of the joy of his heart.

That is to say on the day of His espousals with the fervent soul. It looks as though the Word of God had become man and suffered His dreadful passion, just for the sake of giving Himself to that lowly bride; just as though there

were no one else for Him to love on earth; so absolutely exclusive and personal and inflamed is His love for her.

And in the day of the joy of his heart.

Here is the first revelation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of His immense love for us. Let us be amazed and prostrate ourselves and adore!

CHAPTER XXX

Within the Bridal Chamber

SUMMARY.—Why the Holy Ghost reveals to us the love of God in terms of human love. Of the sanctity of Matrimony, and that it is a kind of revelation. That God gives to Himself due praise for the beauty of the human form divine. What is to be understood by the eyes, the hair, the teeth, the lips, the cheek, the neck of the bride.

THE Bridegroom and His bride have now arrived in the nuptial chamber. With John the Baptist, as friends of the Bridegroom, let us stand guard at the door and *hear with joy the voice of the Bridegroom* (John iii, 29) whilst He pours out a passionate encomium of the mystic charms of His youthful bride. With utmost tenderness He exclaims:

How beautiful art thou, my love, how beautiful art thou!

Whosoever would fain persuade himself that it were a kind of profanation to speak of the divine love in terms of human love, let him read attentively this fourth chapter of the Canticle of Canticles and hundreds of similar passages both in the Prophets of the Old Testament and in all the books of the New. No better proof can be wished for that human marriage has been

instituted by God, among other reasons, precisely in order to offer to men an image and a foretaste of divine love and in order to serve as a natural introduction to it. Such was indeed the mutual love of Adam and Eve innocent. Such were the chaste loves of the holy Patriarchs as also now the loves of truly Christian husbands and wives.

In the Canticle of Canticles God gives to Himself, by the mouth of the Holy Spirit, the praise which is due Him for having endowed the body of both man and woman with beauty. It is the master-piece of His hands, a master-piece which sin has been able to defile, but without robbing it of the native nobility it has from its Creator; a master-piece which puts on a fresh splendour, wholly supernatural, in the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ and in the immaculate flesh of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and in the bodies of all the fervent Christians who adorn themselves with the incomparable jewel of virginal purity, or with that of the virtue of continence and of conjugal chastity, or with that of an austere penance for past transgressions. *And God saw all the things that he had made and they were very good.* (Gen. i, 31.)

From that exalted point of view, it is allowable to us also to cast admiring glances upon this master-piece of God's creative hands, not indeed to take in it either a feeling of vain complacency or a forbidden pleasure, but in order to praise God who with so much wisdom and love made us what we are. Praise God for the wonderful mystery of our creation, by which He made us naturally inferior to the angels, it is true, but

superior to the beasts, in such wise that we find associated in our human nature the functions and excellencies of both the pure spirits and the beasts. Praise God above all for having called us to the supernatural state, to the divine life even here below, and to the glory of the future resurrection. In one word: praise God and return thanks to him for the mystery of the Incarnation and for the way in which it is extended even into each one of us.

Thy eyes are dove's eyes.

They have the meekness and simplicity of the dove.

Besides what is hid within.

Indeed meekness and simplicity are the signs of many other virtues, hidden in the secret of the heart.

Thy hair is as flocks of goats, which come up from mount Galaad.

Let us not be disconcerted by these comparisons of a quite oriental richness. They contain an edifying meaning. In a true servant of God, good thoughts spring up thick and close together as the hair upon his head; and they all spring up towards the Beloved, by skips and jumps, with the irrepressible boldness of goats on the mountain-side.

Thy teeth are as flocks of sheep, *that are shorn, which come up from the washing, all with twins and there is none that is barren among them.*

The teeth here signify the holy desires of the soul. In the bride of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

holy desires must be as strong as teeth, in order to seize hold of their proper food and grind it and assimilate it. They must be *like flocks* of sheep, *that are shorn, which come up from the washing*, that is to say they must be of a dazzling whiteness. *All with twins and there is none that is barren among them:* these desires must be efficient, not sterile; they must bring forth those twins, the love of God and the love of our neighbour.

Thy lips are as a scarlet lace.

On account of the burning sighs of love which those lips never cease to utter to the Heavenly Bridegroom, and so to weave as a garland or as a scarlet lace.

And thy speech is sweet.

Sweet is the speech of the fervent Christian, because ever charitable, sympathetic, compassionate; ever redolent of chaste affection, sincerity, humility.

Thy cheeks are each *as a piece of pomegranate, besides that which lieth hid within.*

Thy maidenly modesty shows itself in the promptness with which, on the least provocation, thy cheeks become suffused with a lovely redness; and this is a token of the virgin purity of thy most secret affections.

Thy neck is as the tower of David which is built with bulwarks: a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armour of valiant men.

The *neck*, firm and upright, is the emblem of a delicate and right conscience which will

not permit either sin or vain scruples to come near it. The *thousand bucklers* which *hang upon it* are the various considerations of the truths of faith on which a good Christian is ruminating day and night, and which afford him great security. The *valiant men* here alluded to, are the saints who have left us such beautiful examples of rightly ordered consciences.

On hearing her Beloved make of herself such a splendid encomium, the bride begins to fear the temptation of vain glory. As an opportune remedy she now brings forward the bitter remembrance of her past sins and the consideration of the ineffable sanctity of God; and this prompts her to exclaim: *till the day breaks and the shadows retire, I will go to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense;* as though she said: During all the rest of my life here below I shall not cease to go to the mountain of Calvary where my love is hanging on the Cross, and to the foot of our altars upon which He offers Himself anew to the Divine Majesty, and where He is kept day and night in the ciborium shut up in the tabernacle. It is, as a matter of fact, in these two places that the love of Our dear Heavenly Bridegroom shows itself the more: therefore there also is it, that we shall be the more able to learn its burning lessons; there must we practise its exercises, *till the day* of the beatific vision *break* and the shadows of earthly life *retire*.

On the mountain of myrrh, that is to say on Calvary, the bride of Jesus will deplore her sins and all the sins of the world: she will strip

herself of all disorderly or even purely natural affections: she will gladly crucify herself with Jesus, her *blood-stained spouse*. (Exod. iv, 26.) On the hill of frankincense, that is to say at the foot of the altar, she will, in a spirit of ecstatic adoration, give free rein to her demonstrations of the most tender and the most ardent love.

On the *mountain of myrrh*, that is to say on Calvary, Jesus, the Divine Word and our Bridegroom, seems to display with an affectation of magnificence the purple robe of His Sacred Humanity, flayed alive, so to say, and bleeding from head to foot; with the gaping wound in His side and His transpierced Heart, making an irresistible appeal to the hearts of all His brethren of good will, for a return of their love.

On the hill of frankincense, that is to say on our altars, as He hides His Sacred Humanity, He seems to be wishing that we should pay greater attention to His divine nature by which He is one and the same God with His Heavenly Father and the Holy Ghost.

This then is the way for me to go in my mental prayer from Calvary to the tabernacle, and again from the foot of the altar to the mount of crucifixion: contemplating with transports of love and gratitude the Sacred Humanity of my Saviour, in order to be led up to the contemplation of His divine Essence, and to rise thence to the contemplation of the mystery of the most Holy Trinity, which is the summit of *the hill of incense*, all dazzling with wondrous light, and fragrant with the most exquisite perfume. As I could not possibly stay long in so sublime a contemplation, when I perceive that fatigue and

distractions are beginning to assail me, I shall humbly return to the meditation of the sufferings and humiliations which my Saviour endured in His Sacred Humanity *on the day of His espousals* with me, which was also *the day of the joy of His heart.*

There are not wanting interpreters who attribute these words: *till the day break . . . I will go to the mountain of myrrh,* etc., to the Heavenly Bridegroom. It is only fair to own that these words do indeed admirably express the whole-hearted love with which Our Lord went up to Calvary, in order to atone for our sins, and with which He renews every day in so many places His immolation on our altars. As for these words: *till the day break,* they put magnificently into relief the perpetuity of the Sacrifice of the Mass which is to be carried on even to the end of the world, to the day of resurrection and general judgement, to the last advent of the *Son of Man,* as He loves to call Himself.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Wedded Wife of the Lamb

(Ch. iv, ver. 7, to Ch. v, ver. 1 of Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—Jesus gives to the soul the coveted name of wife, and adds to it that of His sister. Lions and leopards. Thou shalt be crowned. Fresh encomium of the faithful soul. North wind and south wind. The most Holy Trinity and the honeycomb.

NOW that the youthful bride has been admitted to the nuptial bed of a complete self-abnegation, to the stripping herself of all things created and to a perfect self-surrender in the arms and upon the heart of her Jesus Crucified, she looks, in the eyes of her Divine Lover and Spouse, as having at last reached the fulness of her supernatural charms. This makes Him exclaim: *Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee.*

Now this is literally and absolutely true of the Christian newly-made by Holy Baptism, whether he be an infant or an adult; true also of any Christian who has just gained for himself a plenary indulgence; true also of every fervent Christian who has made, either in confession or out of it, an act of perfect contrition, or again an act of perfect charity. This last case

is precisely that of the bride of the Canticle at this juncture, and Jesus therefore proclaims that she is all fair and without any blemish, and He immediately proceeds to bestow upon her the supreme title which she ardently coveted, a title in which are summed up all the endearing appellations which have hitherto been used by Him: that of Spouse or Wife. He says:

Come from Libanus, my spouse, come from Libanus, come.

This is the first time He pronounces this sweet name of *spouse,* and He Himself seems so taken up with the enchanting sweetness of it, that He is going to repeat it thrice in a short space of time, as though to taste and enjoy its sweetness, or to accustom Himself to it and engrave it deep upon His own loving Heart. But oh! what a music it must be to the ears of the privileged soul! Listen!

Come, my spouse;
Come from Libanus,
From the top of Amana,
From the top of Sanir and Hermon,
From the dens of the lions,
From the mountains of the leopards:
Come: thou shalt be crowned.

The diverse places mentioned in this verse are emblems of the sublime states of contemplation to which this soul is raised from time to time. As for the dens of lions and the mountains of leopards, they give us to understand that the

Christian, as long as he is here below, does not fear to encounter the enemies of God and of his own soul. Strong in the grace of his Baptism, which he keeps ever springing up and flowing over the face of his soul, armed from head to foot with the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost whose fulness he received on the day of his Confirmation, fed with his daily or at least frequent ration of Eucharistic Bread, periodically renewing his vigour in the healing bath of the Sacrament of Penance, this good Christian is not afraid to venture into the midst of sinners, wherever his state or profession or some providential disposition calls upon him to do so as a matter of duty, in order to practise the good works of a saintly active life, and, if occasion offers, even to exercise some apostolate.

Come; thou shalt be crowned.

The bride had previously by the words: *till the day break,* alluded to the future day of her death, which will also be, so at least she hopes, that of her entering into glory. Now Jesus assures her that He is looking forward with a sort of holy impatience to that same day of her death, when it will be possible for Him to crown her. It is as though He were saying: "Bear in mind, O Christian soul, My spouse, that I am throned in glory in the highest heaven, and am preparing for thee a throne worthy of My love, and a bright crown set, as with so many jewels, with the merits of thy good works. Turn thine eyes often towards the heaven of glory; look forward to that crown; stir thyself to renewed efforts to make it still richer and more

beautifully adorned, for My sake, in order to enhance thereby My own (accidental) glory and bliss. To this end be never tired to pass constantly, during the days of thy pilgrimage on earth, from divine contemplation to saintly action and from action to contemplation.

Jesus pronounces His tender invitation with an insistence which makes her heart leap for joy: *Come . . . come, my spouse . . . come: Thou shalt be crowned.* And on their part, the blessed angels and saints, vying with each other, echo the words of their King and sing out in chorus: *Come, come,* O thou our beloved sister: *come; thou shalt be crowned.*

Jesus adds:

Thou hast wounded my heart;
My sister—spouse,
Thou hast wounded my heart,
With one glance *of thy eyes,*
And with one hair of thy neck.

Again what a melody for the loving soul! How good it must be to hear Jesus singing such music in one's hearing! In the past, O my beloved Lord, I have had the misfortune, the dreadful misfortune, which I shall lament to my dying day, the horrible misfortune of wounding Thy Sacred Heart with my sins: ah! but henceforth this will never be again. Now I see Thy dear loving Heart stirred with glad emotion at the sight of my firm resolve and puny efforts to give Thee pleasure. Oh what an encouragement! What a consolation!

With one glance of thy eyes,
And with one hair of thy neck.

That is to say with thy smallest prayers and the most lowly of thy actions, when these are made, as is the case with every true mystic, in utmost purity of intention and fervour of love.

Thy lips, my spouse, are as a dropping honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue.

Under these poetical figures, Our Lord wants to give us to understand the delights He finds in our intercourse with Him, above all, in our Holy Communions.

The smell of thy garments is as the smell of frankincense.

So it is indeed, figuratively speaking, whenever the loving soul consumes herself in acts of adoration of the Divine Majesty: and this she is attentive to do continually, day and night.

My sister, my spouse!

As though the name of sister by itself, or only that of spouse, were not enough to express the extent of His tender affection, Our Lord unites them together so as to throw us into transports of joy. In His Incarnation, the Son of God, the Word Eternal, made Himself really and truly my brother by flesh and blood and the affections of a human heart, and now behold, by the grace of His sacraments, He unites me to Himself in the mystical bonds of a divine marriage. The Christian soul is at the same time both the sister and the spouse of her Lord.

My sister-spouse is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up.

A garden indeed, since within a fervent soul

spring up, bloom and pullulate the flowers of holy desires and the trees of virtues whose fruits are her many acts meritorious unto eternal life. No one save the Beloved is admitted within the precincts of this garden.

And *a fountain sealed up.* That is to say, so guarded, so protected that neither the beasts of the field nor the passers-by are permitted to contaminate it or ruffle its surface by drinking of it. No evil passion and no creature merely as such, has any part in the pure affections of this Christian's heart: they are all jealously guarded for Jesus alone.

O soul who hast been endowed with manifold and wonderful graces, and who art ambitious of advancing rapidly on the austere path of sanctity, mayest thou never more give leave to thine own heart to love anyone but in the Lord Jesus Christ! Then wilt thou be to Him a fountain sealed up, a fountain of living waters, fresh and sweet, springing up towards heaven, and Jesus will slake His thirst therein with intense delight.

Thy plants are a paradise of pomegranates, with the fruits of the orchards. Cyprus with spikenard and saffron, sweet cane and cinnamon, with all the trees of Libanus, myrrh and aloes with all the chief perfumes. The fountain of gardens is in thee, *the well of living waters, which run with a strong stream from Libanus.*

Under the poetical figures of the two first sentences, the Heavenly Bridegroom gives, with a marked complacency, the detail of all that He finds beautiful and winning in that holy soul, and He adds: "Now I will proclaim the two-

fold cause of her marvellous fertility: first, there is in her the *fountain of gardens,* which is none other than My Holy Spirit with His Gifts, Fruits and Beatitudes, and secondly, she holds within herself *the well of living waters which run with a strong stream from Libanus.* Those living waters are the delightful and refreshing mysteries of the two natures in Christ, which the contemplative soul is never tired of drinking in. *Libanus* stands here for the lofty personality of the Word of God.

Now the Divine Goodness closes this episode of a supernatural idyll with this characteristic adjuration:

Arise, O north wind, and come, O south wind: blow through my garden, and let the aromatical spices thereof flow.

In other words: Let periods of dryness or desolation in that soul of good will, who is to me a garden of delights, alternate with periods of spiritual peace and joy; these contrary winds in shaking the branches of the trees and blowing over shrubs and flower-beds, load themselves with their fragrance and spread far and wide their perfumes. Whenever a soul is really dead to self and does not live any longer but for the Heavenly Bridegroom, it is indifferent to her whether she encounter joy or pain, as long as she is doing His holy will. This serves to show the exquisite quality of her every virtue: their perfume spreads far and wide, giving great comfort and edification throughout the Church of God.

At this point of her spiritual life, the

enamoured soul is consumed with her insatiable desire of Holy Communion. See what a graceful turn she gives to the expression of her holy desires: *Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruits of His apple-trees.* If this is not poetry, I wonder where we shall ever find it. All true lovers are poets when they speak of their love to him who is the object of it.

And after this fervent Christian has received Holy Communion, Jesus tells him in the secret of his heart: *I am come into my garden. O my sister and spouse, I have gathered my myrrh with my aromatical spices; I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk.*

We shall do well to note the particular insistence with which our Lord in this verse employs the possessive pronoun, in order to express the sense of delight with which He dwells within a soul so admirably fenced in and cultivated: He says *my* myrrh, *my* aromatical spices, *my* honey, *my* milk. Well said, dear Lord! for indeed everything within that soul is Thine own.

And now suddenly the Divine Word-made-man turns towards the other two Persons of the Most Holy Trinity and invites Them to take Their share of the delights He finds in that little soul. He says to the Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit: *Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.* Mysterious words well worth our closest attention.

Assuredly, if we isolate such a sentence from its context, it may lend itself to a great variety of accommodative or conventional meanings. When, however, instead of so isolating it, we

are careful to view it, in its proper place, in the sequel of the Canticle, we are compelled to see in it a speech of Our Lord directed, not to the blessed angels nor to the saints or the earthly companions of His spouse, but to the other two Divine Persons: so that we have therein, under a transparent veil, a certain revelation of the Most Holy Trinity.

He that is speaking is Our Lord, the Divine Word; and His invitation, as it is couched, can be extended but to the Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, because only Divine Persons could enter within a human soul, to take their delights in her virtues. An angel, pure spirit as he is, is incapable of such a privilege being conferred upon him, either naturally, or supernaturally, or miraculously. To enter within a spirit is possible only to God; every individual angel and also every human soul is open to God alone and shut to all creatures. These can come into touch with another spirit but externally, and derive some enjoyment of it only from the outside.

On the other hand, there is in St. John's Gospel the Scriptural reference for this—Our Lord: *If any one love me . . . my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.* (John xiv, 23.) Who are meant by this *we*, if not the same three Divine Persons who, on the sixth day of Creation, held counsel together and said: *Let us make man to our image and likeness?* (Gen. i, 26.)

This act of entering in within spiritual substances, which is proper to God alone, is a very mysterious operation which ought to fill us with

inexpressible joy, when it is brought about, as in the case of the bride of the Canticles, by means of the Divine presence of love, that is to say by a special effect of Divine Love. It is in this sense again that Our Lord says in the Apocalypse (iii, 20) *Behold I stand at the gate and knock: if any man shall hear my voice and open to me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me.* At the same time as the three Divine Persons of the adorable Trinity take together Their delight in that soul of good will, they also impart to her a certain obscure feeling and consciousness that such a divine fact is taking place within her.

Here then is an intimate intercourse with God, not of course, such as we would have ever dared to ask for, but such as alone can give satisfaction to the inmost cravings of our heart. I am God's little friend; the friend of each one of the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. Each one of these Divine Persons is my intimate friend, my loving guest, all to myself, in the sanctuary of my soul. My God is wholly mine and I, puny thing, am wholly His. O ye human loves, O ye friendships with creatures, where are you when compared with such a love?

Therefore under the graceful and familiar invitation of the Heavenly Bridegroom to His Divine Father and His Holy Spirit, there is concealed an allusion to a mystical experience of the soul which defies description. This fervent soul is become " God's honey " and God in His turn is become " her honey " as St. Augustine assures us. The Most Holy Trinity is the honeycomb infinitely sweet which this soul is permitted

to take hold of, blindly and joyfully, and to feed upon.

As to the assertion of Our Lord that He has eaten *the honeycomb with His honey*, it means that the loving God takes His delights, not only in the soul of the mystic, but also in the frail body of flesh in which she is lodged as the honey in the comb, a body purified, sanctified, deified, together with the soul, by means of the sacraments.

Wonderful mystery of the Divine Love! Let us adore it in silence.

CHAPTER XXXII

The Great Trials of Wedded Life with Jesus

(Ch. v, verses 2 to 8, of the Canticle.)

SUMMARY.—A word about angelical contemplation. Jesus knocks at the door: the wedded soul delaying to open to Him, He turns aside and goes away. Adventures of the soul in quest of her Beloved. How the daughters of Jerusalem soothe her pain and inferior creatures help her in her search after God.

THE great trials of the wedded life with Jesus are the occasional absences of this beloved Husband of the soul, especially when prolonged and made still more unendurable by the persecutions of those around her, as we are about to witness.

Left by herself in a rustic dwelling, in the midst of her garden which she was trying to tend and render very beautiful for His sake, the spouse of the Canticle has been thinking the whole day long about her Beloved. When she retired at night and went to sleep, her mind and imagination were full of His picture and her heart overflowing with tender and burning affections for Him, to such a degree that she dreamt of Him and kept talking to Him in her sleep.

With absolute truth she could say: *I sleep, but my heart watcheth.* So true was this that even in her sleep she perceived the sound of His voice. Then she exclaimed: *The voice of my beloved: He is knocking at my door!* and instantly she found herself wide awake.

One degree further and we should have been face to face with that marvellous phenomenon, rare even among the saints, known to mystical theologians under the name of "angelical contemplation," a contemplation which is not interrupted even by sleep. Yes, it has happened to some servants of God, whilst yet on earth, to perform certain sublime operations of the soul without any participation of any bodily organ, even as though they were already in the region of the spirits. Sleep, which was wont to suspend for them the organic functions of the life of relation with the exterior world, had no effect on their soul, so that they could keep up even then their contemplation, their converse with the Beloved, all their secret intercourse of love with God; they could also receive, either straight from Him, or through the intervention of the angels, His divine communications.

We know this to have been the case with St. Joseph, at the three different times when the Gospel relates that he was made aware of the secrets of God and received His directions. (Matt. i, 20-24; ii, 13-15; ii, 19-21.) There is nothing to prevent us from holding that it was so with St. Joseph habitually, as also with his most holy spouse, the Blessed Virgin Mary, as it was also most undoubtedly the case with Our Lord during all His earthly life.

Our bride of the Canticle, now promoted to the dignity of *wife of the Lamb*—to use the vocabulary of the Apocalypse—is just one degree below this sublime mode of contemplation, called angelic. She is no sooner awakened than she hears Her Divine Lover pleading from outside for admittance. He says:

Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is full of dew, and my locks of the drops of the nights.

Upon which words St. Francis de Sales comments in this wise: "It cannot be expressed, O my Theotimus, how ardently Our Saviour desires to enter into the dwelling of our soul by means of this kind of love," which he calls one of sorrowful complacency. "Now what is this dew and what are those drops of the nights but the sorrows and torments of His Passion?" (*Treatise on the Love of God.* Book V, ch. v.)

We ask again: What is this dew and what are those drops of the night, but the repulses which this Divine Lover of souls meets with, when He knocks at the door of the hearts in which He desires to take shelter? Kept in the cold by those wretches, He turns to the faithful soul for comfort.

Happy soul! Only she must not, under any excuse whatever, put Him off, keep Him waiting outside, hesitate to admit Him instantly within. She must receive Him at His own chosen moment, without any regard to her own convenience. It seems the little bride of the Canticle had yet to learn this lesson by her own

experience. Let us hear the candid account of how things went in her behalf.

From the bed of her repose she answered to her Beloved: *I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?*—that is to say: "Until now, dear Lord Jesus, I have made use of a certain ceremonial with Thee: I have accustomed myself to certain devout practices to which I cling; allow me first to perform these; then will I turn wholly to Thee in the most absolute surrender."

But Jesus would not be put off. In spite of her silly objections, He makes an effort to gain admittance without a moment's delay. She relates the incident with great feeling, thus:

My beloved put his hand through the hole in the door, by which one may work the wooden latch inside; and at the noise He made, *my bowels were moved.*

Oh what saintly emotions are experienced at the near approach of the Heavenly Bridegroom! They thrill not only the spirit but the flesh as well. This it is which prompted David to exclaim: *My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.* (Ps. lxxxiii, 3.) The joy of the superior part of the soul overflows and communicates itself to the inferior faculties and spreads even into the senses. It is only fair that it should be so. The fervent Christian holds himself united to Jesus by every fibre of his whole being, as on His own part Our Lord lays hands upon every component part of this human being, in order to purify it all and transform it into the *new man* which He Himself is.

Let us now see what happened. The bride continues her narrative.

I arose to open to my beloved: my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers were full of the choicest myrrh; I opened the bolt of my door to my beloved, but he had turned aside and was gone. My soul melted when He spoke. I sought Him and found Him not; I called and He did not answer me.

As Jesus had passed His hand through the hole in the rustic door, He had smeared the wooden bolt and latch with the myrrh, the choicest myrrh of His sacred blood trickling from His wounds: that is to say, in order to prepare His little spouse for the ordeal of His sudden departure, He had left the sweet perfume of His recent passage there. No wonder then that as the bride took hold of the bolt and latch, she found her fingers all dripping with the myrrh left there by the touch of the hands of Jesus—that is to say she found herself quite penetrated with the remembrance of His sorrowful Passion.

Many are the souls who fall into the same mistake as the spouse of the Canticle, losing their time in secondary considerations, at the very moment when their Beloved is knocking at the door of their heart for immediate admittance. Instead of instantly jumping out of the bed of their self-complacency in many special devotions, and rushing unadorned, unceremoniously, without any formal preparation, in the state of the mystical nudity of pure love, they allow themselves to get caught into the webs of a formal, complicated and narrow piety and thus keep at

bay, on the other side of the door, Him who so graciously comes to visit them.

He does His best to gain admittance. He tries with His own hand to work the secret spring of the human will which is as the latch of the door. He spreads the sweet odour of His near presence, but He fails to effect an entrance, because the spouse who should have co-operated with Him was busy with her private devotions and raising chimerical difficulties. Then what happens is this: when at last she comes to the door and throws it open, the moment of special grace is passed: the Beloved is no more there and her disappointment is unspeakable.

O thou, therefore, who art espoused to the King of Heaven, whosoever thou mayest be, let me give thee this advice; whenever the inspiration of divine grace visits thee, put aside thy accustomed exercises of devotion, books, rosaries, pictures, vocal prayers, pious practices of any description. Set them aside. Allow thyself to be caught up and impetuously carried away by the Holy Ghost wherever He lists; He will throw thee in the arms and upon the loving heart of thy Heavenly Bridegroom. All the rest does not matter at such a moment. All the rest are only means, whilst the Lord Himself is the end. When He is pleased to suppress all intermediaries and to present His dear Self to thee in an immediate manner, He will brook no delay; do not thou therefore oppose to Him the walls and doors and wooden bolts of thy accustomed exercises of piety.

It remains now for us to listen to the delightfully dramatic account of the youthful wedded

wife, in her search after the Beloved; and as we do so, we may note also how the interest of this marvellous idyll, so perfectly natural in its very supernaturalness, grips our hearts and waxes more and more poignant.

The keepers that go around the city found me; they struck me and wounded me; the keepers of the wall took away my veil from me.

We have already seen these guards in the second chapter, verse 5, of Canticle: but then the bride had no complaint to proffer against them, whilst now they handle her rather roughly, they strike her and wound her and take away her veil. The meaning of all this is that the loving soul, now aware of how wrong it was for her not to have opened at once to Jesus, went and accused herself of this fault to her Superiors or to her Spiritual Director. This time, far from consoling her in her distress, they have spoken severely to her; they have torn or violently wrenched from her the veil of self-love, in which, unconsciously perhaps, she had been wrapping herself up. However, so great, so ardent and sincere is her love of Jesus, that she loses not a single moment in self-pity or futile complaint. She turns to the blessed angels and saints of paradise and addresses them in these touching words:

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I languish with love.

Is not this charming? as also charming is the method which our heavenly friends take, in order

to soften the grief of their little sister still on the earth of her pilgrimage: they make her speak of her Divine Lover; they ask:

What manner of one is thy beloved of the beloved, O thou most beautiful among women? What manner of one is thy beloved of the beloved, that thou hast so adjured us?

And after she has described to them her beloved, as we shall see in our next chapter, the choir of heavenly friends give her this reply full of feeling:

Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou most beautiful among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside, and we will seek him with thee?

Can sympathy manifest itself in more sincere, artless accents? Such are the feelings which the blessed sons of light, who dwell in the Heavenly Jerusalem, entertain towards us, their brethren, who in obscure faith and in the midst of manifold obstacles grope our way in search of God.

To the choirs of the blessed angels and the dear saints, the chorus of inferior creatures join themselves, if only we will hearken to them. They too seem to address us this query, *O thou most beautiful one, whither is thy beloved turned aside and we will seek him with thee?*

These inferior creatures cannot, by themselves and for their own account, set out in search of God, and attain Him, but only through us and with us. Does not the star of the three Kings seem to say: "Let us go together and seek Him: nay, it is I who will point Him out to you?" So do all inferior creatures, whether

animate or inanimate. Each of them has its own way of leading us up to God, provided we listen to them and receive their testimony. They are all saying: "We will seek thy Beloved, with thee and for thee, faithfully and disinterestedly; for we, who are inferior creatures, can lay no claim to His divine love: this is thine own exclusive privilege, O thou human nature, who art most beautiful among us all: *pulcherrima mulierum.*"

It cannot be doubted that if the beasts, the plants, the stars and all other creatures could only speak, they would express their admiration of an intelligent and free being, who is self-determining, whose glance of the eyes is so imperial, whose voice can be in turn so soft or so terrible, whose hands possess such cunning, whose brow is so majestic, whose heart is so deep, whose mind is so acute, who, to sum it all up in one word, is so divinely beautiful. See how the dog, for example, bestirs himself around his master, and at a sign or a word from him, eagerly springs forward to do his behest. The horse, the ox, the camel, the elephant hold their strength and their marvellous instinct at his service. Although they do not understand what they are bidden to do or why, they seem to say: "Thou O man, and our master, thou knowest; that is enough for us; art thou not constituted King over all nature?"

Even the mighty waters, even light, even lightning, allow themselves to be tamed by the hand of man, yoked to his triumphal car. And whenever, instead of bidding them to draw him nearer to God, he forces them to serve sin, by

ministering to his evil passions, these creatures groan and protest in their own way. *For we know,* says St. Paul, *that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain even till now.* (Rom. viii, 22.) *For the expectation of the creature waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that made it subject in hope: because the creature also itself shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.* (Rom. viii, 19-21.) So the inferior creatures are groaning and, so to say, blindly reaching out for the grand revelation of the children of God, when absolutely every part and parcel of Nature, having been purified, will henceforward be used only unto the glory of its Creator.

In the meanwhile they unite their voices to those of the blessed angels and saints of paradise, saying to the soul of good will: *We will seek* thy Beloved *with thee.*

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Little Spouse makes a Description of her Beloved

(Ch. v, verses 10 to 17 of Canticle of Canticles.)

SUMMARY.—How the Bridegroom is white and ruddy. His head, His locks, His eyes, His cheeks, His lips, His hands, His breast, His throat. He is all lovely and he is my friend.

LET us now retrace our steps and see what kind of an answer the spouse of the Canticle made to her heavenly friends when they pressed her to describe to them her Beloved.

I have already interpreted this lovely page of the Canticle in my little treatise on The Mystery of Jesus (Part I, ch. x, towards the end). I might be content to refer my reader to this; however as he may not have the volume at hand, and as, on the other hand, the present treatise would not be complete without this passage, I beg to reproduce here my paraphrase of it, not, however, without adding to it a great deal.

My beloved is white and ruddy.

Jesus is ruddy by the splendour of His Divine nature; He is *white* by the immaculate flesh

which He took in the most chaste womb of His Virgin Mother. *White* again by the ineffable innocency of His human life. He could ask the Jews: *Which of you shall convince me of sin?* (John viii, 46) without any of them being able to give him a reply; and He is *ruddy* by all the blood which He shed for our redemption. *White* again in His Blessed Sacrament under the species of bread, *ruddy* under those of wine.

Chosen out of thousands.

Not only out of thousands or ten thousands, but out of the millions of millions of blessed angels and holy men: chosen out of them all, preferred above them all. And why? Ah! because in this *Beloved of the beloved* we discern two natures, the divine and the human united together, and so marvellously knit into one Person that they make our Jesus to stand as the most absolutely and supremely lovable object in the world.

His head is as the finest gold.

The head of our Lord is His divine nature. *Caput Christi Deus: the head of Christ is God,* says St. Paul. (1 Cor. xi, 3.) It is as though the spouse exclaimed: "The first thing to be noted about Him is that He is God. In the words of the Nicene Creed: "*I believe in God . . . and in Jesus Christ His only Son, begotten of the Father before all times: God of God; light of light, true God of true God.* Can anyone describe to us the splendour of His beauty more dazzling than the finest gold, the intense brightness of sanctity with which His Father begets

Him eternally? O ye creatures, can you believe that He is my lover, my Bridegroom, my Husband, and that He vouchsafes to stoop to my lowliness, to kiss me and embrace me and unite me to Him?

In commenting on the Canticle of Canticles, one ought never, for a single moment, lose sight of the great fact that our Beloved is the Divine Word, the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the Son of God. True, He is the *Word-made-flesh, "the Son of Man"* as He loves to call Himself, the Man-God: but the one feature of His theandric complex being, which ought at first to arrest our attention, is His Godhead.

As for the physical head of His Human body, can anything be found in the whole range of the created universe, more noble, comely and attractive? Every feature of His dear countenance is breathing out meekness and the most burning charity.

His locks are as graceful *as branches of palm-trees, black as a raven.*

Here allusion is made to the divine perfections which are found in Our Lord, coequal to those of His Divine Father; and which also are black, that is to say obscure and impenetrable to the eyes of human understanding, especially whilst man is here below. Still, although we cannot pretend to understand the infinite perfections of Our Lord, we are permitted to celebrate them and to declare that they are absolutely incomparable. The spouse makes use for this purpose of a charming image, that of the green

palms as they shoot forth from their parent-tree and fall around it with magnificently graceful curves. On the other hand each one of the locks and of the hair of the adorable head of Jesus, imbued with the blood of His sacred Passion, is to us a token of salvation and as a palm of victory, similar to that of the martyrs and confessors who are already in the glory of paradise.

His eyes are as doves upon brooks of water, which are white as though they were *washed in milk, and sit beside the plentiful streams.*

The eyes are the mirror of the soul: therefore, oh! what modesty, what purity, what simplicity, what candour, what meekness and tenderness, what compassion, must the eyes of our Divine Master have reflected, during His earthly life! And now that He is seated in glory, must it not be so still?

During the whole space of His sacred life and still more so during His Sacred Passion, the eyes of Our Lord shed many tears over the great evil of sin and over the misfortune of those who commit it—tears full of bitterness for Him who was shedding them, whilst they are full of sweetness for us who by their merits have obtained the grace of our conversion.

His cheeks are as beds of aromatical spices set by the perfumers.

Rows of aromatical flowers in a garden are set in straight lines parallel to each other. The spouse here asseverates that the blood which trickled from the brow of Jesus under the cruel

prick of each thorn of His crown of derision, gave to his cheeks the chequered appearance of a bed of flowers, and that each tiny drop of this blood is infinitely more precious than the most sweet-scented aromatic, since it has virtue enough to heal a thousand worlds.

His lips are as lilies dropping choice myrrh.

The very choicest myrrh is assuredly the reparation for the sins of the world, offered to God by Him who is without sin. Our own sorrow for sin, as we are the offenders, and still so wretched, our own expiations and reparations offered to the Divine Majesty are but myrrh of a very inferior quality. In order for it to exhale a sweet perfume and be acceptable to God, it must be mixed with that of superior quality: that is to say with the infinite merits and satisfactions which Jesus offers up to His Divine Father.

From the lips of our Saviour crucified have dropped the seven supreme words of His, which, as so many drops of choicest myrrh, have found their way to the very depths of all Christian hearts. No sooner was this meek Lamb of God raised aloft on the atrocious instrument of torture, the cross, than He proffered His first supplication to the Father in behalf of His tormentors. *Father,* He exclaimed, *forgive them, for they know not what they do.* (Luke xxiii, 34.)

His hands beautifully moulded, are as of gold, full of hyacinths.

There is no doubt but that the hands of Our Lord, viewed from a purely artistic standpoint,

were the most beautiful that ever were: after them, those of His sweet Virgin-Mother Mary: hands which had been moulded, so to say, with infinite care and complacency by God Himself, on account of the sublime tasks they were to perform and the works of mercy they were to sow broadcast in the world.

The spouse says that the hands of Jesus are of gold, because of the refulgence they shed in blessing and caressing little children, giving sight to the blind, touching and healing lepers, taking dead people by the hand and raising them to life again, multiplying the five barley-loaves and small fishes to the point of feeding more than five thousand people, blessing the bread and wine and transforming them into His very body and blood.

But oh! never did these adorable hands perform a greater wonder than when they meekly surrendered themselves to be nailed to the wood and slowly torn by the weight of the sacred body of the Lord. Then it was that they became filled as with so many precious hyacinths, by the clots of blood which stopped in their wounds and clustered around the ghastly nails. My God, how we should love and venerate these dear hands of our Saviour dying on the cross!

His belly is as of ivory, set with sapphires.

The immaculate whiteness of the flesh of Our Saviour was gleaming on the cross and was enhanced by the purple marks of the cruel flagellation which had not spared a single spot in His body. *From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head,* said Isaias (i, 6) *there is no sound-*

ness therein: wounds and bruises and swelling sores: they are not bound up nor dressed, nor fomented with oil. Those bruises were as so many sapphires set in the ivory whiteness of His flesh.

Besides its dazzling whiteness, the characteristic properties of ivory are its hardness and incorruptibility. It had been predicted of this sacred body of Our Lord, centuries before He came into the world, that *not a bone of Him would be broken.* (Exodus xii, 46; John xix, 36) —and *that He should not be given to see corruption.* (Ps. xv, 10.) Is there anything less incorruptible than the soft parts of the human flesh, contained within the cavities of the breast and of the stomach? Yet, although our Jesus will be made to taste, in every part of His sacred body, inside and out, the bitterness of all sorts of torments and of death itself, neither will His bones be broken, nor will any part of His sacred flesh see corruption.

His legs as pillars of marble that are set upon bases of gold.

Noble pillars which support the most beautiful temple that has ever been built for the honour of the Divine Majesty, namely the sacred body of Christ. The sanctuary of this temple is the sacred breast of Our Lord, and its *Holy of Holies,* His most Sacred Heart, wherein we can easily gain access, since the lance of the soldier has pierced it through and through. There must we often repair, if we wish to thaw the ice of our own miserable hearts and be set all aglow with love. *I am come to cast fire on the earth,*

says Our Lord, *and what will I but that it be kindled?* (Luke xii, 49.)

Pillars of marble *that are set upon bases of gold.*

Gold is even more precious than marble. In telling us that the feet of the Beloved are of gold, the spouse intends to direct our attention to the horrible pains they endured on the cross when the whole weight of the body of the Saviour was pressing upon the ghastly wounds which the nails had made in piercing them through and through.

O my poor Jesus, my dear Lord, how terrible are Thy sufferings! and all for me. I crave Thy forgiveness. It is I indeed who caused these particular sufferings of Thine, by the guilty alacrity with which my own feet have carried me to seek after mine own will, or after created things, nay after sin.

The statue of the dream of Nabuchodonosor (Dan. ii, 31-33) had a head of gold, but its feet were part of iron and part of clay: Our Beloved has not only the head but also His hands and His feet of finest gold, because, according to the forcible expression of St. Paul: *In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally.* (Coloss. ii, 9.)

No indeed, the feet of my Saviour are not of clay. And not His statue, but His living Self, stands erect in the midst of the human race, which He transcends wholly with His surpassing greatness, setting, century after century, all the combined forces of sin and hell at defiance, until the time when His heavenly Father will make

His enemies His footstool. (Ps. cix, 1.) We shall witness this great triumph of His on the Day of the Last Judgement.

His form as of Libanus, excellent as the cedars. Indeed what more noble, majestic aspect could be imagined than that of the Lord during the succeeding periods of His earthly life, especially during His Sacred Passion, and now on His throne in the glory of heaven?

Was there ever a more elegant and shapely torso than that of the New Adam, stripped, and drawn out or bent double for the scourging? Or again—and then it was draped—bent double under the weight of the cross and its beam? And the most beautiful arms, are not they those of my Jesus, extended on the cross? They will not fold again: they are nailed, so that poor sinners, to the end of the world, may ever throw themselves upon His loving, merciful, gentle Heart.

I am lost in admiration before the transcendent, majestic figure of Moses (Exod. xvii, 10-12) interceding for his people, praying with arms extended, supported on the right hand and on the left by two faithful servants; but my admiration knows no limits when I contemplate Him of whom Moses was only a prophetic figure, and I adore Him, feelingly, enthusiastically. In order that His extended arms should not relax, He willed that they be nailed to the cross. Nailed! dost thou hear, O my soul! nailed I say; nailed! Great heavens! what an atrocious torment!

True, my Lord is not any longer hanging on

the cross, He will suffer now no more; He is now seated in the ineffable repose of His glory: on which account I return endless thanks to His Eternal Father: but then He never ceases to apply to us the merits of His sufferings and death on the Cross. Even now it is still as though He were actually suffering and dying; I can, therefore, do no better than transport myself in spirit with the Spouse of the Canticle, to the time when, being nailed upright and arms extended on the Cross, my Jesus was offering His sweet Self and suffering unspeakable agonies for me.

How comely Thou art, O my dear Lord Jesus crucified! How worthy of all love! Ah! let me break my heart as a poor vessel of sweetly perfumed ointment and pour out its contents upon Thy sacred feet!

His throat most sweet.

His throat, considered as the organ of His speech. How sweet to hear Him utter all these words of mercy and compassion that are related in the four Gospels: among them all, those which are His last will and testament to Mary and to each one of us: *Behold thy Son—Behold thy mother!* (John xix, 26, 27). Oh! thanks, my dearest Lord, everlasting thanks be to Thee!

And He is all lovely.

The spouse sums up in one word all the transcending excellences of her Beloved. In the person of my Lord, even during His earthly life, there were already found in absolute perfection

the human natural order, the angelical natural order, the supernatural order both of grace and of the beatific vision, the divine order. In very deed He is *all lovely*.

In his book entitled JESUS INTIME, Mgr. Sauvé warns us against losing sight, to the great detriment of our faith and love, of most of the splendid treasures of divine glory, and bliss, and science, and grace that are hidden in Our Lord. This is a timely admonition. We are but too prone to make to ourselves a representation of Him so narrow and paltry that it will be incapable of nourishing our souls. Not so the little spouse of the Canticle. She embraces her Beloved in the totality of His being and of His perfections and she proclaims Him all lovely and delectable. Is not the Heavenly Father *well pleased in Him?* (Matt. xvii, 5.) Is He not all lovely in the eyes of His sweet Mother Mary the Virgin? All lovely also in the eyes of the nine choirs of the blessed angels and of all the saints and just in heaven, in purgatory and here on earth? How, then, were it possible that I, the least and last of all, should not also find Him all lovely and sweet and delectable?

Such is my beloved, and he is my friend, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.

In these concluding words of the spouse there is a very human, and very feminine, note of legitimate pride in the possession of such a friend. It is well for the Christian to testify to his appreciation of the immense honour done Him by Our Lord, when He comes so lovingly and familiarly to Him as He does in Holy Com-

munion, and in the intimate intercourse of mental prayer.

Arrived at the summit of the second stage of the spiritual life, or the Illuminative Way, the spouse has not a shadow of human respect left in her. She boldly proclaims to all who will listen, whether angel or demon or man, that she is desperately enamoured of the Son of God, and that she will know no other joy during the remainder of her pilgrimage here below, than that of His divine embraces. Her mystical initiation is now perfect.

End
of the Sixth Treatise.

APPENDIX

Two Contemporary Writers on Mysticism

(Reprinted from *Chimes* of April, 1923)

THE long-expected work by Dom Cuthbert Butler, until quite recently Abbot of Downside, has at last appeared under the title of Western Mysticism, and has received the welcome it deserved. It is a standard work, compact and solid, and English-speaking Catholics may well consider themselves the richer for its publication. The author's erudition is apparent throughout, yet without being cumbersome or oppressive. It seems to us that an interesting study might be made of Abbot Butler's work by setting it side by side with the series of publications started a few years ago by another writer on mysticism, Dom Savinien Louismet, whose short treatises have won considerable popularity among all sorts of readers, non-Catholics as well as Catholics. If two writers, approaching the same subject from such different standpoints as Abbot Butler and Dom Louismet, are seen to agree in their main conclusions, the purpose of this paper will not be in vain.

We should naturally expect two Catholic writers on Mysticism to agree at least on the fundamental question, though there is plenty of scope for divergence in the presentment and exposition of the subject. At first sight, Abbot

Butler would seem to differ considerably from his confrère, whom he accuses of *watering down* the traditional idea of Catholic Mysticism (cf. p. 10). But is the difference between the two authors really so profound as this passage would imply? Or is it not truer to say that their views are really identical, though differently expressed? The following pages will enable the reader to decide for himself.

The first volume of Dom Louismet on the MYSTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, now in its third revised and enlarged edition, was in the nature of a prelude or introduction. The real starting point of his plea for a return to the Catholic traditional notion of Mysticism is to be found in the preface and first chapter of his second volume. This said by way of clearing the ground before us, let us first hear Abbot Butler:

"There is probably no more misused word than 'mysticism.' . . . Against all this stands the perfectly clear, traditional, historical meaning, handed down in the Christian Church throughout the centuries, not subject to confusion of thought until recent times.

"The mystic's claim is expressed as the experimental perception of God's Presence and Being, and especially union with God—a union that is not only merely psychological, in conforming the will to God's Will, but, it may be said, ontological, of the soul with God, spirit with Spirit. And they declare that the experience is a momentary foretaste of the bliss of heaven." —*Prologue*, WESTERN MYSTICISM.

Now hear Dom Louismet:

"The Mysticism I speak of in these pages is Catholic traditional Mysticism, which is purely and simply the mysticism of our holy Mother the Church, who is the Bride of Christ and the teacher and infallible oracle of truth; the mysticism with which the Old and New Testaments, but more particularly the divine Gospels, are overflowing; the mysticism of the Apostles, of the first Christians, of the martyrs and confessors of all ages, of all men of good will; a mysticism that is Catholic not only in name, or because it is sanctioned by the authority of the Church, but Catholic also in that it embraces all things and persons who are Christ's. *All things are yours,* says St. Paul, *and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.* (1 Cor. iii, 22, 23.)

"Mysticism is an experience; a soul-experience . . . the special experience of a human being, as yet a wayfarer on earth, '*actually tasting and seeing that God is sweet.*' (Ps. xxxiii, 9.)" And he goes on describing mysticism as "the genuine Christian life, lived in its fulness, according to each one's vocation and state." He calls it "the true Higher Life." "Therein," he says, "the loving soul meets the loving God. Therein man transcends the whole created order of things visible and invisible, to such an extent as even to meet God, to grapple with Him in the dark, and to wrest from Him, if not His name, which is ineffable, certainly at any rate, His blessing." —THE MYSTICAL LIFE. *Preface.*

From such a lofty idea of mysticism, Dom Louismet never departs or looks down through-

out his five volumes. If anything, it becomes as he proceeds, so to say, more and more refined and luminous until it shines like a shield of gold on which the full rays of the sun are beating, so that one is fairly dazzled. See Chapters X, XVII to XXV of MYSTICISM—TRUE AND FALSE; Chapters XXII to XXV of DIVINE CONTEMPLATION FOR ALL, and Chapters XXXIV to XXXVI of THE MYSTERY OF JESUS.

Further, in his Prologue the Abbot goes on to say: "It is to be understood that there are phases and stages of mysticism that fall short of the supreme experiences laid claim to in the following extracts (of the Fathers)." And now Dom L. in his second volume, Ch. IV: "Spiritual writers use various comparisons to make us understand at the same time the process of the mystical life, its oneness of design, and the stages of it with their necessary consecutiveness. It is failure to grasp the harmonious, all-round development of the spiritual man, which has caused modern writers to introduce such unnatural distinctions and separation of things that God meant to go together from the beginning and all along."

On page 18 of WESTERN MYSTICISM we read: "Father Sharpe is probably right in saying that if 'mysticism' is to lose its recognized, traditional meaning, the use of the word should be dropped—it should not be applied to other things quite different from it." Consonant with this, on p. xviii of the Preface of THE MYSTICAL LIFE, we read: "It has been said that in paganism everything was God except God him-

self; it may be said that in our days everything is called mysticism except Mysticism itself. Is it not high time that a halt should be called on this road to destruction? Such loose and indiscriminate use of the word Mysticism, even among Catholic writers, is, in my opinion, responsible, not only for much of the present confusion of thought on the subject, but, as an inevitable consequence (though it may not be apparent at first sight), for much of the present slackness in the pursuit of Christian perfection. *Save me, O Lord*, exclaims David, *for there is now no saint;* and the reason he assigns is this: *truths are decayed from among the children of men, they have spoken vain things, every man to his neighbour.*" (Ps. xi, 2, 3.)

On p. 189 Abbot Butler tells us: "Like religion, mysticism is not the privilege of the intellectual, but is within the reach of the poor and the unlearned and of the little ones of Christ; and without doubt, it is most commonly and successfully cultivated by those who know not its name."—This great truth is brought out in a characteristic way by Dom Louismet in the second part of his first volume, in *the Our Father of the Idiota* and *the Our Father of a Little One*, respectively Elevations VI and VII: only they should be read integrally.

On page 192 the Abbot speaks of "a mysticism that is simple and practical and downright in character, being no more than the exercise of piety and prayer and love in a very earnest and whole-hearted manner." And on page 6 of the second volume of Dom Louismet we read: "Shall we say that (this wonderful life with God)

is a very extraordinary sort of life? If by extraordinary we mean that it is seldom met with: yes, alas! it is so. But if we mean an impracticable, a well-nigh impossible life, one meant only for a few chosen souls, we are in error. No, mystical life is neither impracticable nor well nigh impossible, nor is it only for a few. It is simply the very perfection of Christian life, to which we are all called. . . . It appears to us extraordinary and well nigh impossible only because we are *of little faith* (Matt. vi, 30), and have allowed our charity to grow cold."

On page 113 of WESTERN MYSTICISM we find: "Fervour, love, and rapturous joy are the constant characteristics of the descriptions of their contemplations left by the great mystics." Now compare with this the appreciation of the recent volume of Dom Louismet, THE MYSTERY OF JESUS, by a reviewer in *The Catholic Herald of India:* "The author is not guilty of any hyperbole when he says in his introduction 'the purpose of this little book is not science—not even the science of Jesus for its own sake—but love, honey-sweet, delectable, inebriating, all-consuming love. . . .' the whole book is a song of praise to Jesus . . . which goes straight to the heart for its unaffected simplicity."

On page 270 Abbot Butler remarks: "Against the Cluniacs, St. Bernard reasserted St. Gregory's idea that a contemplative life can only be made up of alternations of contemplation and the excises of the works of the active life for the good of others."—And on page 26 of his second volume Dom Louismet says: "The first great

division of the mystical life into its two (component) parts is set forth in the words of our Saviour: *the Lord thy God thou shalt adore, and Him only shalt thou serve* (Matt. iv, 10), ADORATION standing for Divine Contemplation, and SERVICE for Saintly Action. . . . Every mystic's life is full of these two elements . . . as (to use a homely simile) a fresh egg is full of white and yolk. And just as in an egg, there is no place for anything else, so in the mystic's life there is no place for sinful or even purely natural affections. All is supernatural."

Let us hear now the clarion voice of the great Augustine (quoted by Abbot Butler on page 26). It is the beginning of the Enarration on Psalm xli: *Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God.* "This psalm is sung as a psalm for understanding. For what understanding? Come, my brethren, catch my eagerness; share with me in this my longing: let us both love; let us both be inflamed with this thirst; let us both hasten to the well of understanding. Let us long for it as the hart for the brook; let us long for that fountain whereof another Scripture saith: *For with Thee is the fountain of life.*" (Ps. xxxv, 10)—and he goes on in that style, pouring forth the most sublime teachings about mystical life. Now I ask: Does not this magnificent outburst of the great bishop in a sermon to his people, to his poor tradespeople and fishermen of Hippo, bear Dom Louismet out in his contention that in the estimation of the Fathers of the Church all Christians were *de jure* mystics?

On page 192 Abbot Butler says: "It is a fact to be deplored that devout souls are apt to be frightened off mysticism by the presentations commonly made of it nowadays, whereby it is always identified with a quasi-miraculous state of visions. Yet it was the standard teaching in the Catholic ages down to modern times that contemplation is the natural term of a spiritual life seriously lived, and is a thing to be desired, aspired to, aimed at, and not infrequently achieved by devout souls." Compare with this the very firm words of Dom Louismet's DIVINE CONTEMPLATION: "The notion of Divine Contemplation is not less in need of being elucidated and brought back to its legitimate, traditional Catholic meaning than was that of the Mystical life. It has suffered just as much at the hands of modern writers, by a host of whom it has been misunderstood, distorted, narrowed down and all but made a bugbear; whilst in its true self Divine Contemplation is the grandest, noblest, sweetest, easiest thing in the world; in some measure and under some form or other, obligatory on all; and as necessary to the Christian at every stage of his spiritual life as is the act of breathing to the physical well-being of every animal, wherever situated in the scale of life, and at whatever stage of its development."

One could multiply tenfold these comparisons and quotations, but this is more than sufficient to demonstrate how truly, as a matter of fact, the general appreciation on mysticism of Abbot Butler and of Dom Louismet run on the same lines. It could hardly be otherwise, as the two authors have derived their doctrine from the same

sources. I happen to know that Dom Louismet began his study of mysticism as early as the year 1878. The first authors which were then pointed out to him as likely to be of help, Görres and Ribet, he had to throw away in disgust. It eventually dawned upon him that if he wanted to get at the genuine catholic, traditional notion of mysticism, he ought to seek for it, not in this or that particular modern author, were he even a canonized saint, but in the sacred liturgy such as it has been handed down by the Apostles and further elaborated out of the Sacred Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers.

In 1900, that is to say two years before Abbot Butler set to work on his WESTERN MYSTICISM (which he informs us was twenty years in the making), Dom Louismet had already collected copious references from Cassian, St. Gregory the Great (especially the *Moralia* and the sermons on Ezechiel), and St. Bernard. At that time also he took up St. Augustine's works with the same end in view. This may explain the comparative speed with which his books on Mysticism have appeared during the last few years, and certainly accounts for the great similarity between Abbot Butler's teaching and his: they both drank at the same fountains.

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